



POKÉ HARAM!

WHY RELIGIOUS EXTREMISTS
WANT POKÉMON TO GO!

LONG IN THE TOOTH AND CLAW THE WORLD'S OLDEST ANIMALS
STRENGTH, IT'S PELTING PERCH! FISH FALLS IN THE OZ OUTBACK
RHEAS ON THE RUN OUTSIZED AVIAN ESCAPE ARTISTS

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AND JACK
WOMACK
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Fortean Times 345

strange days

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32 FROM OUTER SPACE TO YOU

JACK WOMACK has been assembling his collection of UFO-related books for half a century, gradually building up a visual and cultural history of the saucer age. Fellow writer and fortean **WILLIAM GIBSON** joined him to celebrate a shared obsession with pulp ufology, printed forteana and the search for an all too human truth...

38 MANUSCRIPTS OF MYSTERY

From all the coverage it has received, you might be forgiven for thinking that the Voynich Manuscript is the only mysterious and undeciphered volume in existence. True, it is probably the strangest, with its unique text and hermetic illustrations, but it is certainly not alone. **IAN SIMMONS** enters the Library of Babel in search of other unreadable oddities...

44 FASHION VICTIMS

This month's Fashion Weeks in London, Paris, New York and Milan will no doubt witness some strange creations, but this is nothing new. Throughout history, people have tried to stand out from the herd by turning to fashion, even when the results could be bizarre, harmful and even fatal.

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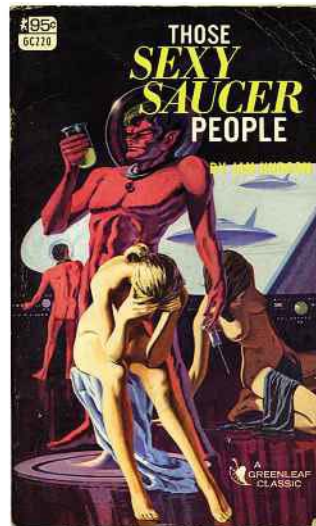
editorial

The coming of the saucers

LIBRARIES OF BABEL

This issue has emerged with a somewhat bookish theme. News that a Spanish publisher was planning to print a facsimile of the famously enigmatic Voynich Manuscript – an ‘unreadable’ text of curious provenance that has baffled scholars and cryptographers for a century – prompted Ian Simmons to examine it, and other ‘manuscripts of mystery’ (p38); elsewhere (p50), the Hierophant’s Apprentice continues to advise you on how to assemble your own Library of Babel, tackling that classic study of human folly in its many forms, Mackay’s *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*.

We’re also thrilled to welcome two titans of speculative fiction to our pages this month. Jack Womack – whose highly fortan work was the subject of an article a few years back (see Robert Guffey’s “A Truly Fortean SF Writer”, FT236:53) – has spent 50 years assembling an astonishing collection of printed sauceriana: bizarre books, pulp paperbacks and strange pamphlets testifying to the UFO mania that gripped the West through the Cold War, the Space Age and beyond. Luckily for the rest of us, some of the gems from this cache of ufological ephemera have been handsomely collected in a new book entitled *UFOs Are Real*. Defining the nature of that reality has provided grist to many a mill over the years, and in this issue it’s the subject of a fascinating personal discussion between Jack and SF legend (and fellow FT reader) William Gibson (p32). Not everyone will agree with their views on where the ‘truth’ of the UFO experience lies, but I suspect most readers will recognise the way most of us first encountered it and other fortan subjects: turning a spinner rack of yellowing paperbacks in some long-vanished shop. That the modern UFO mythos has been mediated in no small measure by our encounters not with aliens but with these strange cultural artefacts in no way diminishes it – perhaps it makes it richer and all the more more beguiling...



work of Carl Pabst, who had laboured heroically in deciphering the tiny squares of paper filled with Fort’s crabbed shorthand, a small portion of which was then published in the journal *Pursuit* between 1978 and 1989. Dr Reed then began scanning Pabst’s card indexes, which pass to Mr X to transcribe as digital text. In an email to us on 6 August – Fort’s birthday – Mr X says that their work began in December 2014 and, to date, they have transcribed more of the notes than Pabst, and before him Thayer (in

Doubt between 1937 and 1951) managed to publish. This work, thus far, can be accessed at Mr X’s website – www.resologist.net/notes/ – marshalled in groups of five or 10 years between 1800 and 1860. Those familiar with Fort’s originals will be interested to learn that Mr X has created a single chronological sequence, where Thayer and Pabst followed Fort’s eccentric system of several sequences which often split between several different boxes. Mr X details both Fort’s and his working abbreviations and simplifies the references to the eight great catalogues of quakes, meteorites, eruptions and tornadoes used by Fort.

Dr Reed writes: “Mr X is making an enormous contribution to the fortan

community by making the Fort notes available to the world. But he is doing an even greater service by identifying the original, full bibliographic citation for each of Fort’s notes, which Fort never did in either his four books or in the notes at the New York Public Library. Fort would usually just note an abbreviated form of the source, so that one has to usually do some real digging to find the actual source.”

As a motherlode of raw data gathered from the newspapers and scientific publications of the time, these notes will be of inestimable value to researchers into all kinds of anomalies. This is a long-term project done for the love of it and the benefit of posterity; for which, on behalf of forteans everywhere, we extend our sincere appreciation to Mr X and Dr Reed.

David Sutton
DAVID R SUTTON

Bob Rickard
BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING



Why fortan?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

UNDERWEAR FOR
NINJAS

SD
SMUGGLING
DUDS

THE CORE COLLECTION

ABSTRACT - CARBON DIGI-CAM - JUNGLE CAMO - SKULL CHECK



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strangedays

A case of Poké Haram

While some churches have welcomed Pikachu and gang, the world's religious extremists are calling for 'Satanic' Pokémon to Go Away

Nintendo's hit new augmented-reality smartphone game *Pokémon Go*, in which players hunt the titular virtual monsters in real-world locations around them, has been making endless silly-season headlines in the West since its release in July, but elsewhere the reaction has been a little more vociferous. As might be expected, Pikachu & Co have yet again been condemned from the mosques of the Middle East in the name of Islam – or that element of Islam which considers Pokémon to be worthy of serious religious comment – with Saudi scholars reiterating their 2001 fatwa against the vile *djinn* in all their guises, whether on GameBoy, DS, N64, GameCube or iPhone. Among other things, clerics have accused Nintendo's beloved characters of “possessing the minds” of vulnerable youths (unlike hate preachers, obviously), encouraging gambling, being in league with “international Zionism” and promoting Freemasonry and polytheism. As the Pokémon evolve into new forms once they gain enough experience-points in battle, the game is even seen by some hard-line clerics as fostering belief in Darwinism – which, as it is not mentioned in the *Koran*, is definitely Poké Haram. (Some American Bible-bashers have damned the game on similar grounds).

Such things have been reported on in FT before, during past bouts of Poké-mania – see FT149:18, where you can learn that, rather than being a simple contraction of the phrase ‘Pocket Monsters’, ‘Pokémon’ actually



LEFT: A number of Christian churches are now PokéStops too.

Russia's Defence and Security Committee, went even further. “There is a feeling that the Devil came through this mechanism and is simply trying to destroy us spiritually from within,” he said. Irreligious Poké-players outside of Russia are able to escape Patriarch Kirill's reach, however, much to the

Saudi Scholars have reiterated their 2001 Pokémon fatwa

means “I am a Jew” in Syriac.

New to the pastime of condemning the Pokémon as agents of evil, however, is the Russian Orthodox Church, with that organisation's spokesman Vakhtang Kipshidze declaring the latest smartphone version of the game to be “a threat to human integrity”, and warning foolish youths against playing it in church. Apparently, doing so could lead to a three-year prison sentence; plenty of time for convicts to catch ‘em all there. Franz Klintsevich, of

chagrin of priests at the Russian Orthodox St Nicholas Cathedral in the Austrian capital of Vienna, where during August a mysterious “Devil-Pokémon” called ‘Raa666’ appeared, leading to Nintendo receiving an official complaint. The strange thing is that there is no Pokémon named ‘Raa666’; the roster has expanded exponentially since the 151 creatures of the initial Pokémon Red/Blue GameBoy titles released outside of Japan in 1998, but Pokémon No 666 is a wholly inoffensive butterfly-beast named Vivillon. Perhaps a sacrilegious hacker is playing a prank on Cathedral authorities.

Back in Blighty, the religious and political response to Poké-mania has been more benign, with even Jeremy Corbyn having a go on the thing. Meanwhile, the Church of England taught a lesson of Christ-like tolerance

to their Orthodox cousins by effectively encouraging people to catch Pokémon in their churches. Signs saying things like ‘JESUS CARES ABOUT POKÉMON GAMERS’ started appearing, and vicars were allowed to set their churches up as public PokéStops (locations where large numbers of Pokémon can be caught and exchanged by players), to encourage tots and teens to come inside and complete their collections... and then talk about Jesus.

Trendy vicars have tried such tricks before; during a previous bout of Poké-mania in 2000, a Kent-based theology student named David Tate invented a rival to the Pokémon Battle-Cards, then all the rage, in the shape of an alternative, more religious card-game called ‘Christian Power Cards’. Here, Biblical figures like David and Goliath could face off against one another Top Trumps-style, each having different skill-rankings in a number of categories, to see which one would win. There were 120 religious figures to collect, but, surprisingly, not Jesus, as “it would defeat the purpose if [He] was beaten by one of the bad characters”, said Tate. At the time the story made the news in June 2000, Tate had sold around 150 packets of cards – rather fewer than Nintendo had done with Pikachu et al; surely the best solution would have been a more commercially-viable compromise in which the pixellated beasts faced off against famous Christian figures. Moses v Meowth, St George vs Charizard or Jonah vs a highly-evolved Level-30 whale-type Pokémon would have been battles any sane child would have paid good money to see.

For more on the current outbreak of Poké-mania, see Noel Rooney's column opposite, p54, and next issue. *ABC News*, 26 Mar; *Guardian*, 20 July; *www.thelocal.at*, 5 Aug; *D. Mail*, 3 Aug; *Times*, 16 Aug 2016.



LADY AND THE GHOSTS
Ada Goodrich Freer and the most haunted house in Scotland
PAGE 18



FISH FALL DOWN UNDER
Strewth, Sheila! It's pelting spangled perch in the outback!
PAGE 24



A BIT LONG IN THE TOOTH
Celebrating the world's longest-lived cats, parrots and penguins.
PAGE 26

The Conspirasphere

NOEL ROONEY finds an unexpected convergence of conspiracy theory and mainstream media reporting in two rather different stories... or is this just the new normal?

Two recent events – one trivial, one anything but – have stimulated the mainstream into discussing conspiracy theory. The attempted military coup in Turkey brought the idea of a false flag into focus and gave it a high profile in a medium where it is normally a taboo subject. Meanwhile, the release of *Pokémon Go* (see facing page and p54), apart from rousing the usual (and in this case, probably justifiable) hand-wringing about trivia taking over the world, brought with it the possibility that the game is encoded with high-level spyware.

The coup, if it were not for the tragic loss of life involved, might have been comical. A small (and apparently rogue) detachment of Turkey's huge military blocked a few main thoroughfares, seized a number of media outlets and major infrastructure nodes, and – in a gambit that only later would begin to look ominously symbolic – blocked off the bridge that joins Turkey's Asian heartland to its European fragment. President Erdogan – apparently – survived several attempts on his life, but emerged unscathed to direct a massive wave of popular opposition to the coup, via social media and a handy mobile phone app.

At least, that was the initial story. The backlash that the righteously enraged Erdogan unleashed (at the point of writing, upwards of 60,000 people have been imprisoned or lost their jobs) provoked rumours that he himself had engineered, or encouraged, the coup so he could squash his political opponents and seal his power base. The rumours were supported by an erstwhile colleague, Fethullah Gülen, now domiciled (and very nicely, thank you) in the United States, whose supporters in Turkey appeared to bear the brunt of the disgruntled president's vengeance. In response, Erdogan and his cronies accused Gülen of orchestrating the coup, with the help of the United States government.

The coup narrative, and the theorising around it, has seen a remarkable convergence of opinion between the mainstream media and the



Conspirasphere. When the *Daily Telegraph* and Alex Jones are saying pretty much the same thing, you know you are in a brave new world of some description. I wonder if the increasing popular distrust of officialdom, and the political dislocation evidenced in the Brexit vote, is slowly warping the media landscape into something rich and strange.

And then there was *Pokémon Go*, a game that encourages users of smart phones to seek out cuddly – and entirely fictional – creatures in public spaces, and occasionally get robbed of their phones in the process. The craze was just getting into its stride when stories began to appear suggesting that the game software was deeply suspect. Personal information could be accessed on phones that downloaded the game; and then there were darker rumours that the app was little more than a cover for spyware enabling Big Brother could track users wherever they went – (although why BB would be interested in citizens cavorting under a bush looking for Pikachu is beyond me).

Again, the *PG* media phenomenon allowed considerable convergence between mainstream media and its more quixotic cousin online. I suspect we will see more of this convergence in the near future: Alex Jones as editor of the *Torygraph*?

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Porcelain tea service going under hammer

Nottingham Post, 9 June 2015.

Barking children limber up for curious climbing frame

Guardian, 20 Mar 2015.

Fatal ironing board incident

Richmond & Twickenham Times, 19 June 2015.

Plan eyes revival of seal penis market

Toronto Star, 8 June 2015.

Pope has hope for 'pile of filth'

Toronto Star, 19 June 2015.

FIELDS OF DREAMS

Visitors to a farm near Nantwich, Cheshire, were greeted by a 38ft (11.5m) tall straw sculpture of the Beatrix Potter character 'Peter Rabbit'. The sculpture, which celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Beatrix Potter, took around 1,000 man-hours to build and weighs eight tonnes (8,000kg).

PHOTO: PAUL ELLIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES





French artist Saype created what is said to be the world's largest biodegradable painting on the Chaux-de-Mont ski slope above the Swiss Alpine resort of Leysin. PHOTO: ALAIN GROSCLAUDE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Bales of straw in the form of a bride and groom on a field in Billerbeck, western Germany PHOTO: AFP PHOTO/DPA/MAJA HITIJ

SIDELINES...

LONE SURVIVOR

Last February, four Colombians went fishing near Malpelo Island, 300 miles (480km) off the Colombian Pacific coast. The engine failed and the radio broke in a storm. One of the fishermen, aged 29 and unnamed, survived two months adrift in the 23ft (7m) open skiff by eating seagulls and fish in an ordeal that killed his three companions. He was rescued last April by a China-bound merchant ship, 2,000 miles (3,200km) southeast of Hawaii. *Times*, 7 May 2016.

MISSION CREEP

Randy Velthuisen, 53, tried to kill off the weeds in his garden with a blowtorch, but ended up burning down his house in Everson, Washington State. *Sun*, 9 April 2016.

FALSE PROPHET

Ugandan police have arrested Emmanuel Solomon Ssemakula and his nine followers, who had allegedly been with him for six years. Ssemakula claimed to be Jesus Christ and said he had also preached in Kenya and Tanzania. The self-styled Messiah could be charged with sabotaging government programmes by instructing his followers to avoid hospital when ill; all they had to do was to pray to him. He claimed to be on a mission to select 144,000 people for the Second Coming of his father (Eh?). *tuko.co.ke (Kenya)*, 3 July 2016.

THREE BANGS AVOIDED

In a freak coincidence, three gardeners in Suffolk each dug up an unexploded bomb from World War II within five hours of each other. *Sunday Star*, 12 June 2016.



MARTIN ROSS

History under fire

The destruction of the Syria's heritage continues apace



ABOVE: The plinth of Simeon's final pillar, complete with later boulder. BELOW: A recent photo shows severe damage to the plinth.

Qala'at Sema'an, the great church and monastery of Saint Simeon Stylites [FT259:76], the first and most renowned of the pillar saints, was severely damaged by a rocket attack on 12 May 2016. Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the site, northwest of Aleppo, has come under the successive control of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Da'esh (ISIS), the Kurdish YPG (on 28 May 2015) and most recently the Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham. It remains close to the front line between rebels, including Jabhat al-Nusra (the local al-Qaeda branch), the YPG, and the regime. Amr al-Azm, a Syrian-American academic trying to organise the preservation of Syria's endangered heritage, said three sources in the area told him they believed Russian jets were responsible for the attack, which holed the church's façade.

Following the Stylite's death in AD 459, the church built in his

Simeon became one of the most famous people of his age



honour was completed in 491. This vast edifice – the largest Christian church in the world before the construction of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in 537 – comprises four separate basilicas radiating out from an octagonal chamber, once probably domed, built around the remains of the Stylite's tallest pillar. Simeon set himself up on a 9ft (2.7m) pillar in about AD 423 – possibly in a vain attempt to escape the attention of visitors who continually interrupted his solitude and meditation. After four years he graduated to a taller pillar 18ft (5.5m) high, on which he stood for three years; then he spent 10 years on a third pillar 33ft (10m) high. The fourth and last pillar, built by his admirers, was 60ft (18m) high, surmounted by a balustraded platform. Here he remained for his final 20 years, exposed to severe winter winds and scorching sun. The solitude he had sought eluded

GOOGLE EARTH



him, as he became one of the most famous people of his age, visited by throngs of sightseers, both Christian and pagan, from Ireland to Persia – including three Byzantine emperors.

The final pillar was still standing at the end of the sixth century, but all that remained in recent times was the meter-high marble plinth or base: over the centuries, pilgrims chipped bits off the pillar and, according to one account, consumed the powdered stone in water as a magical potion. The plinth was surmounted by a boulder that arrived some time in the 20th century, nobody quite knows when or from where. A photograph taken after 12 May this year shows that the boulder has been toppled and the plinth severely damaged.

BERNARD GAGNON / CREATIVE COMMONS

• While the vandalism wrought by Da'esh in Palmyra [FT334:16], Hatra, Nineveh and elsewhere is well known, destruction across the region has been widespread. In August 2012 the enormous 12th century chapel (below) inside Krak des Chevaliers was damaged



by mortar fire from Assad's forces. The castle, arguably the greatest in the world, was also hit by air strikes in July and August 2013. As Robin Fedden put it, "any castle after Krak is an anti-climax".

Aleppo, currently under pitiless siege, has been severely trashed. The great Al-Madina covered souq, largely unchanged since the 16th century and partly dating back to the 13th, was burnt out in 2012; and the 148ft (45m) minaret of Aleppo's Great Mosque, which had survived several earthquakes since it was erected in 1090, was brought down by Assad's artillery on 24 April 2013. The National Museum was bombarded on 11 July 2016, causing serious damage. Ninety per cent of the Sufi shrines round the city have been destroyed. Aerial photographs of the great Roman city of Apamea, near Hama, show dozens of ugly holes dug by treasure-seekers, and there are rumours of mosaic floors ripped up by bulldozers. The Roman outpost of Dura-Europos in eastern Syria (site of the earliest known occurrence of chemical warfare, c. AD 256 – FT247:18) has been under Da'esh control for some months, so we should fear for the fate of the oldest known Christian church in the world, located there. *D.Telegraph, 14 May 2016, plus UNESCO websites.*



SYRIA963 / CREATIVE COMMONS

TOP: An aerial image of Apamea. ABOVE: The Crusader castle of Krak des Chevaliers suffers an airstrike in August 2013.

SIDELINES...

UNDER OUR NOSES

A bacterium that lives in the human nostril produces a new class of antibiotics that – it is believed – can be used to fight hard-to-treat infections such as MRSA. We are warned that, without effective countermeasures, drug-resistant superbugs could cause 10 million deaths a year by 2050. *D.Telegraph, 28 July 2016.*

POTTER FANS THWARTED

Mystical Moments, a shop in Slaithwaite, near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, sells magic wands to cast healing spells. Richard Carter, 57, who spends whole days at his lathe crafting each wand and anointing them with oil, said: "If I had someone come in wanting a wand just because they liked Harry Potter, I would not sell them one, no matter how much money they were offering." *D.Telegraph, 8 Aug 2016.*

OCTOPORN

James Hush, 27, of Blackpool, Lancashire, appeared in court on 1 July charged with possessing extreme porn of a woman having sex with an octopus. He was also accused of possessing 15,942 images of child sex abuse. *Sun, 2 July 2016.*

A RIGHT SPONGER

Compulsive eater Hadi Sayyed Ali, 16, weighs 19 stone (120kg) after he became addicted to eating household sponges in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. *D.Star, 24 May 2016.*

EARRINGS UP BOTTOM

In a bizarre coincidence, a doctor asked to carry out an X-ray on a suspected thief found her own stolen jewellery poked up his bottom, including two gold rings, four gold earrings and two gold necklaces. Police investigating a break-in in central Turkey arrested a 24-year-old man identified as "ÖA" after noticing his "peculiar" walk. Suspecting he had swallowed or hidden the stolen goods, they took him to a hospital in the Beysehir district of Konya province to get him X-rayed. *Huffington Post, 16 June; Metro, 17 June 2016.*



SIDELINES...

THEY'RE RAWL YOURS

Urged on by his wife, rawlplug enthusiast Peter Barnard, 67, has sold his vintage collection for £1,500 – to David Harvey, the boss of Rawlplug Ltd in Glasgow. Mr Barnard had hundreds of the plugs, promotional items and tools dating back to the 1920s at his home in Gillingham, Dorset. (John Joseph Rawlings invented the wall fixings in 1911.) *Sun*, *Metro*, 23 Mar; *D.Mirror*, 2 April 2016.

NOAH'S ARK CRASHES

A replica of Noah's Ark collided with a Norwegian Coast Guard vessel as it was towed into Oslo harbour on 3 June, causing damage to both ships. The half-size Biblical replica, one of two built by Dutch millionaire Johan Huibers, 57, after he dreamed of a flood in his home province, somehow lost control and crashed into the moored patrol vessel *Norren*, sustaining a big hole in its side. No animals were on board. *Int. NY Times*, 11 June 2016.

STEAMING SQUIRRELS

Three-year-old Finley Renouf was feeding a grey squirrel in Tehidy Country Park, near Redruth in Cornwall, when a gang (more correctly a 'scurry') of six other squirrels burst out of the undergrowth and charged at him. One of them then pounced, sinking its teeth and claws into his hand. He was treated for puncture wounds in hospital. *theguardian.com*, 14 July 2016.

POETIC JUSTICE

A convicted murderer in China avoided serving time in a jail cell by pretending he had rheumatism. He was held in a comfortable prison hospital in Hubei Province, but after 13 years he was bored with spending his life in bed, so admitted his deception. However, he discovered he could no longer stand as his muscles had wasted away. *New York Post*, 17 May 2003.

ANIMALS AT LARGE

A RASH OF RHEAS ON THE RUN
(AND AN EMU) PLUS ANOTHER ABC



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ABOVE: A rhea in the Rhondda! The inhabitants of Ton Pentre got a surprise when this one turned up one morning in August.

RHEAS ON THE RUN

• A South American rhea called Chief escaped from its owner in the Wakefield area of West Yorkshire around 16 July. Three days later it was spotted in the Thornes area by witnesses who incorrectly identified the bird as an ostrich. The 5.6ft (1.7m) tall fugitive was caught relaxing on a patio in Wakefield on 20 July. Rheas seem particularly adept in doing a runner. In May 2015 Rosie-Lee was one of three rheas that bolted from a farm in Jersey after being spooked by a herd of errant cows. Her 15-year-old companions, Marty and Rembrandt, were found a short distance away, but she spent a week on the run before being recovered. Another rhea, a male, disappeared from a smallholding at Carlton-in-Lindrick,

Chief spent a week on the run before being recovered

Nottinghamshire, on 22 June 2015, prompting a widespread search by armed police. The hunt spread as far as South Yorkshire, with police following up reported sightings in the Rotherham area. He was captured after four days only a few fields from home. [PA] 26 June 2015; *Times*, 22 July 2016.

• One rhea briefly delayed a train travelling from Ipswich to Saxmundham in East Suffolk as it strolled down the track near

Campsey Ashe on 24 May 2012 [FT290:12]. On 9 July "an emu" was spotted crossing the railway line "near Saxmundham" – maybe this was the errant rhea. In any case, neither was caught. Earlier, around Christmas 2009, another rhea reportedly escaped from an estate near Campsey Ashe and was seen near Eyke and dashing across the A12 in Marlesford. Steve Friend of Tunstall saw it twice, once in April 2010 and again at the end of June. That month, it was chased and caught by an RSPCA inspector, who shot it with a tranquilliser dart, but it died from "some sort of panic attack". *D.Mail*, 23 June + 1 July 2010; 25 May 2012; *Lowestoft Journal*, 9 July 2012.

• Rita the rhea also met a sad end [FT316:16]. She escaped from a

smallholding in Starlings Green, Essex, on 15 March 2014. Police were concerned, fearing she could cause a car crash. Gamekeeper Stuart Howe, 65, spotted the bird in a rapeseed field after she had been roaming a golf course in Hertfordshire for more than a month. He killed her with a single shot to the head from 70 yards and said she would be turned into gourmet sausages. *BBC News*, 20 April 2014.

- Six years ago, Elaine and Ian Wilson bought three rheas from a breeder in Wales to keep as pets. Around the time Chief was cornered in Wakefield, one of the Wilsons' birds, a male, escaped from the enclosure in Patna, Ayrshire. "One of them got spooked by something," said Mrs Wilson. "He managed to vault over a high stone wall. I am very worried about him – he will be disoriented, hungry and scared." Over the next week, the large bird was spotted by numerous people, in a boggy field and outside shops. He's still at large, as far as we know. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 28 July 2016.

- A rhea was seen wandering down a street in Ton Pentre, in

ABC IN BEDFORDSHIRE

Following our feature on Alien Big Cats [FT344:20-25], a panther-sized animal was spotted several times in the village of Silsoe, Bedfordshire, on 18 August. Rob Terry was walking his cocker spaniel when the ABC emerged from a barley field. He described it as larger than a Labrador, with jet black fur and a "terrific, 3ft [90cm]-long tail". An ABC (presumably the same one) had also recently been sighted in the nearby villages of Flitwick and Barton.

A year earlier, Deborah Hamill, 62, believes she and her sister

were chased by a 'panther' in Streatley, Bedfordshire. Having passed a 5ft (1.5m)-long feld skulking in a field, the pair pursued it. "We saw a big black cat in the hedges," she said. "It crouched like it was about to hunt. It turned around and started coming towards us... we just legged it. We only just made it back to the car. I thought it was my last day. My heart jumped up into my mouth." A sheep from a nearby farm was mauled within the next month. *Bedfordshire on Sunday*, 21 Aug; *D.Telegraph*, 23 Aug 2016.



the Rhondda Valley, South Wales, at 8am on 9 August 2016. Lynne Evans, 58, got a fright when she opened a blind and saw the bird peering in, just a foot away. *Wales online*, 9 Aug; *D.Mail online*, 10 Aug 2016.

- A rhea called Lawrence escaped from a garden in Norton Subcourse, Norfolk, on 16 August. He was spotted on nearby marshes and cornered by owner Ashley Bullard, 34, but he escaped when Mr Bullard had an asthma attack. Lawrence was still at large six days later. Mr Bullard was offering a reward of £200 for his safe return. *Beccles & Bungay Journal (online)*, *BBC News*, 18 Aug; *ITV News*, 22 Aug 2016.

- A 15-month-old male emu, one of six owned by retired farmer Bernard King, 73, of Whipstead near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, jumped out of his 4ft (1.2m) pen on 2 August. The bird (erroneously identified by some witnesses as a rhea or ostrich) ran around country lanes prompting many sighting reports before being captured in Glemsford, about 12 miles (19km) south of Whipstead, about two hours later. "I hand-reared him from when he was an egg so he is perfectly tame and he would never have harmed anyone," said Mr King. *D.Mail*, *Sun*, 4 Aug 2016. (Thanks to Matt Salusbury for data on rheas from his forthcoming *Mystery Animals of the British Isles: Suffolk*.)



ABOVE: Lawrence has legged it from his home in Norton Subcourse, Norfolk.

SIDELINES...

NOT DEAD AFTER ALL

A distraught pet lover found what he took to be a dead cat, wrapped it in a blanket and took it to an animal rescue shelter. When they cleaned it, staff at GSPCA in Guernsey discovered it was a muddy black-and-white dog hand puppet. *Metro*, 1 July; *Sun*, 5 July 2016.

SMALLEST EGG

Georgia Crouchman, 22, was collecting eggs from her 20 chickens in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, when she found one 15.5mm long – smaller than a 5p coin. It beat the world record for smallest hen's egg, which stood at 18mm. *Metro*, 7 June 2016.

MACABRE RELIC

A white shirt stained with John Lennon's blood sold for £31,000 on 25 June. It belonged to Jay Hastings, a concierge at the Dakota building in New York where the Beatle was shot dead by Mark Chapman in 1980. As Lennon collapsed, Hastings tried to give him first aid. *D.Mail*, 28 June 2016.

WOMAN IN BLACK

Four times in as many weeks last May and June, customers at the Silverburn shopping centre in Glasgow reported seeing the apparition of a woman dressed in black "period clothing". Managers called in members of an outfit called Glasgow Paranormal Investigations to try and establish the cause of the sightings.

<i> 8 June 2016.



MARTIN ROSS



HUMAN WEAPON

Tatyana Allen, 18, was arrested in Daytona Beach, Florida, on 4 July after using her six-month-old son to batter her boyfriend, who was also the boy's father. The boy was taken to hospital, where he was "doing OK". Allen was being held without bail. [AP] 5 July 2016.

GOLDEN FROG EXCITEMENT

A rare golden frog born on a farm in Thailand's Phrae province was given to Master Bapat Witthusilo, a famous monk at Mai Chareontham Monastery in Rong Khem district. No matter how much the frog 'sparkled' in the sunlight, he refused to predict winning lottery numbers for the villagers, no matter how many times they asked. *bangkok.coconuts.com*, 9 June 2016.

PYTHON ON A PECKER

A Thai man recovered in hospital after a 10ft (3m) python emerged from the squat lavatory in his home in Chachoengsao province and sank its teeth into his penis. Attaporn Boonmakchuay, 38, said the python was "yanking very hard" as he tried to wrestle it off, helped by his wife and a neighbour. Mr Attaporn, who lost a lot of blood in the ordeal, was making a good recovery. Workers dismantled the loo, extracted the python and released it back into the wild. *khaosodenglish.com*, 25 May; *BBC News*, 27 May 2016.



MARTIN ROSS

The fate of MH370

Is one of aviation's great mysteries closer to a solution?

Flight MH370 took off from Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia at 12.40am on 8 March 2014 [see FT313:4]. The Boeing 777 was carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew. At around 1.30am, First Officer Fariq Abdul Hamid bade farewell to Malaysian air traffic control, after which radar and then satellite tracking lost all contact. In subsequent months, the aircraft's disappearance has become one of aviation's greatest unsolved mysteries.

Despite the extensive search of the southern Indian Ocean, no trace of the aircraft was found until the discovery of a wing section called a flaperon on Reunion Island off Madagascar in July 2015, confirmed as debris from MH370 the following September. Other debris from the plane subsequently turned up: a horizontal stabiliser from the tail section, found between Mozambique and Madagascar in December 2015; a stabiliser panel with "No Step" stencil, found in Mozambique in February 2016; an engine cowling bearing a Rolls-Royce logo, found in March 2016 in Mossel Bay, South Africa; a fragment of interior door panel found in Rodrigues Island, Mauritius, in March 2016; and fragments including what appears to be a seat frame, a coat hook and other panels found on Nosy Boraha island in north-east Madagascar in June 2016, along with clothing, laptop cases, backpacks, and an Angry Birds bag.

According to world-leading air crash investigator Larry Vance, photographs of the recovered flaperon show a jagged edge, suggesting high-pressure water erosion that could only be caused if someone had been deliberately guiding the plane into the ocean. "The force of the water is really the only thing that could make that jagged edge that we see," he told Australian news programme *60 Minutes* in



ADRIEN BARBIER / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A stabiliser panel from MH370 found in Mozambique in February 2016.


Someone was piloting the plane when it hit the ocean

July 2016. "It wasn't broken off. If it was broken off, it would be a clean break. You couldn't even break that thing." He said the fact the flaperon had apparently been deployed for landing also indicated that someone was piloting the plane when it hit the ocean. "You cannot get the flaperon to extend any other way than if somebody extended it," he said. "Somebody would have to select it." It certainly appears to be a case of suicide and mass murder, probably by Captain Zaherie Shah (although his sister begs to differ).

An Australian-led search for

the missing jet had focused on an area of the ocean floor 2,000km (1,242 miles) off Australia's west coast, selected on the assumption the flight was running on autopilot after veering off course; but an official co-ordinating the search effort said the wreckage could be outside that search zone if someone had been in control of the plane when it crashed. Vance, formerly investigator-in-charge for the Canadian Aviation Safety Board, was the chief author of a report into the 1998 SwissAir Flight 111 crash off Nova Scotia, which killed 229 people. The force of that crash broke the plane into more than two million pieces. He told *60 Minutes* that an absence of such wreckage was one factor suggesting MH370 landed in controlled circumstances. *Guardian*, 26 Mar, 13 May; *D.Telegraph*, 21 June, 22 July; *BBC News*, 1 Aug 2016.

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Life after death

TO KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING IS TO KNOW WHERE YOU'VE BEEN

Based on the erosion process 'solid rock to boulders to pebbles to sand' our great scholars collectively agreed that to form all the sand in the world would take a thousand million years, an aeon, and confirmed "This Planet Must Be Old"

Dictionary – Sand – *Created over the past half billion years.*

From this point onwards everything known to the history of Mankind was constructed. Deeptime was born; sedimentation rates, dinosaurs, fossil record, evolution, plate tectonics, are all dated from this old planet perspective. Combined facts that give radioactivity there atomic readings.

However' an aeon to form the entire world's sand is totally wrong because beach pebbles are formed by the process of tidemark, they get bigger not smaller. Every dirty tide leaves a mark, a dirty stain over the previous hardened and scuffed stain, broken layers clearly seen if one

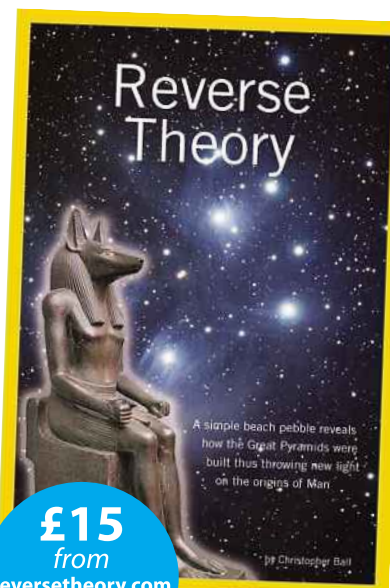
wishes to see them. A sea-basin is just like a dirty washbasin and the mechanics are fully explained in this powerful and detailed book.

Consequently the foundation for an old planet and therefore radiometric dating is wrong. Sand has come from our missing landscapes, from places like the Grand Canyon and the Great Butts of Arizona, removed when the forming limestone was still soft and mud-like.

The steep sides of these canyons and gorges tell us how the pyramids were built and knowing how the pyramids were built tells yet another story, a story quite opposed to evolution. It seems circumstances prevailed that took mankind on a course down to animal rather than the other way around.

But is RT right? Only a closer inspection of the humble beach pebble will call for a geological recount.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Our archaeological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)

OPEN WIDE

Archaeologists have uncovered the 1,600-year-old skeleton of an upper-class woman displaying snazzy dental work near the mysterious ruined city of Teotihuacan, which is approximately 30 miles (50km) north of Mexico City. The woman had an intentionally deformed skull, being extremely elongated (hey, it was the done thing in her day), and was around 35 years old when she died. But her most intriguing features related to her dentistry: she had round pyrite stones inserted into her two top front teeth, which would have given her a somewhat glitzy smile, glittering in the Mexican sunlight, and a lower false tooth made of green serpentine. She was clearly a dedicated follower of fashion. *Phys.Org News*, 8 July 2016.

MISTRESS OF THE ANIMALS

In 2005, the well-preserved burial site of a presumed female shaman or witch doctor was discovered in the Hilazon Tachtit Cave in Galilee, northern Israel. She had been interred with others in the cave, but her burial place had been sectioned off by a stone slab. It is thought the small-statured woman, only about 4ft 9in (1.5m) tall, had lived during the late Natufian era, about 12,000 years ago. She was clearly someone special, for archaeologists have now managed to reconstruct from the physical remains the complex nature of the burial ritual that had taken place, giving us a rare glimpse of rather strange funerary activity in such remote antiquity.

The whole interment process had been carefully planned and must have entailed considerable prior preparation. It had begun with the digging of an oval pit in the cave floor. Then a layer of materials and objects were laid down – seashells, broken bits of basalt, red ochre, chalk, and several complete tortoise shells among them. In turn, these and the walls of the pit were covered by sediment containing ashes, limestone, and animal bones. Only then had the woman been



TOP: Snazzy dental work discovered on a 1,600-year-old skeleton in Mexico.
ABOVE: The burial site of a presumed shaman at Hilazon Tachtit Cave in Galilee.

placed inside the pit, in a semi-upright position described as a childbearing posture. Tortoise shells were placed underneath her head and pelvis, and her body was further accompanied by marten skulls, a wild cow tail, a boar's foreleg, a leopard's pelvis, an eagle's wing and, disturbingly, a human foot. Finally, limestone blocks and shells were placed on top of the corpse. The funeral party had then held a ritual meal consisting of some 86 tortoises – around 55 pounds of meat. The leftovers were placed in the grave, after which it was sealed

with a large rock. The little lady appears to have been revered as 'mistress of the animals', with perhaps the tortoise being her special power animal, her animal spirit helper. *Phys.Org News*, 5 July; *D.Mail online* 8 July 2016. (Original article in *Current Anthropology*.)

WHAT WENT BEFORE

Archaeologists using the aerial laser surveying technology known as LIDAR over the South Downs National Park in southeast England have rediscovered a long-lost segment of a Roman

road running between Chichester and Brighton. Nice, but much more importantly, and totally unexpectedly, the survey also revealed impressively extensive pre-Roman large-scale field systems that had been hidden beneath woodland until LIDAR penetrated the foliage. Trevor Beattie, chief executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, described it as the "discovery of a vast area farmed by prehistoric people on an astonishing scale". James Kenny, archaeological officer at Chichester District Council, said it suggested a civilisation closer to ancient Greece, Egypt or Rome than what is known of prehistoric Britain. He wondered who was growing the crops, who was eating the food and where they were living. "The scale is so large that it must have been managed, suggesting that this part of the country was being organised as a farming collective," he said. The Romans may have brought us sanitation, under-floor heating, and long straight roads, but it now seems that the Brits they encountered were more than just pretty faces, even if they were woad-painted. *BBC News*, 12 July 2016.

WHISTLING BULLETS

Talking of the Romans, in the second century AD, they mounted a major attack on native defenders of a hilltop fort on Burnswark Hill in southwestern Scotland. Sling bullets used by the attackers have been uncovered; some of these are made of stone, but smaller ones shaped like acorns (considered lucky by the Romans, apparently), were made of lead. These small bullets were all drilled with puzzling small holes, but the explanation for them came when the fisherman relative of one of the archaeologists, John Reid, pointed out that when he cast a line with lead weights "that have got holes in them like that", they whistle. It transpires that the lead sling bullets did indeed make a sharp buzzing or whistling noise in flight. It was possible to sling several at once so that they made a weird, threatening sound to terrify their opponents. Clever devils, those Romans. *Live Science* 13 June 2016.

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

203: OLYMPIC ODDITIES

Title reflects the collection of sports oddities brought out in 1918, followed by a companion cartoon version in 1920, by Robert Ripley, now famous for his *Believe it or Not!* volumes, a contemporary of Fort and possible inspiration for *The Book of the Damned* (1919) and *New Lands* (1923).

"There is a muscular strength of men, and it may be that sometimes appears a strength to which we would apply the description 'occult' or 'psychic'" – Fort, Books, p1036

The 2004 Athens Games gave rise to this column's first Olympic pot-pourri (**FT189:18** – see this for many pertinent references here omitted). With Rio in full swing (as I write), adapting Monty Python, And Now For Something A Little Bit Different.

A few ancient Olympic memoranda. The games were always held at the same place, so no expensive inter-city bidding. The first ones, held in 776 BC, consisted of just one event – even Leni Riefenstahl would have been hard pressed to turn that into an epic.

No Marathon race. Though commemorating the victory run of Pheidippides (cf. Browning's poem, 1879), it was an 1896 Baron de Coubertin invention. Likewise, although a flame glowed throughout the ancient games, the torch relay was introduced for the 1936 Berlin Olympics by Carl Diem (sporting administrator) and Joseph Goebbels, with Adolf's enthusiastic support.

Contrariwise, one ancient custom we should think of re-introducing is the flogging of cheats, and not just for athletes – might reduce the modern scourge of diving footballers: Bend Over, Christiano!

No steroids, so no doping scandals. But there were individuals with 'performance-enhancing' diets. Above all, Milo, who daily consumed 20lb (9kg) of meat, 20lb of bread, and three pitchers of wine, this culminating in a Mr Creosote-like ingesting of an entire ox – for this and similar bull(?), cf. Athenæus, *Learned Men at Dinner*, bk1 paras 412-3. A meat diet originated with long-distance runner Stymphalos; previously (Pausanias, bk6 ch7 para7), the training diet was cheese fresh out of a basket – vegetarians might shout Feta Was Better!

Since most events were done in the nude, little fear of sexual concerns, though there were cases of gender-benders (both ways), albeit no controversies over who may use which loo; cf. Gordine Olga Mackenzie, *Transgender Nation* (1994, p30); 'Hypospadias & Sex Change in Ancient Greece,' multi-authored, *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 11, 2014, 1343-4.

Partly because of this male nudity, women were not allowed to spectate, let alone participate in the games. They could, though, own and enter teams for the chariot-races,



Princess Cynisca of Sparta (her name means 'female puppy') being the first to do so and win.

Modern notions pedalled by Avery Brundage and company of a pure ancient 'The Game's The Thing' ethos are largely fantasy. Greek athletes frequently took large 'bungs' to compete for a particular city rather than their native one, and 'celeb'-winners were rewarded by such perks as tax exemptions and free meals for life – did Spartans get something tastier than their infamous black broth?

A papyrus document of AD 267, translated by Dominic Rathbone, just published in the Oxyrhynchus series (see its online data base for individual volumes, also many specific websites) is the earliest example of a 'fix'. Although connected with some local Egyptian games, it's a fair bet there were similar deals behind the Olympics and companion Games (Isthmian, Nemean, Pythian). It involves the teenage wrestlers Demetrius and Nicatinous who had reached the finals. The latter's father offers to pay Demetrius 3,800 drachmas if he would throw the final – perhaps symbolically, this was the average price of a donkey. Should Demetrius welsh on the deal and win, he was liable for a big cash payback – shame we don't know what happened.

Another memorandum. We have (obviously) no time statistics for the races. And, precious little for distances. Except the long-jumpers Phayllus and Chionis, respectively credited with 55ft (17m) and 52ft (16m) leaps. Incredible, of course. My 1960s Loughborough College PE students concluded, via experiments, that these are feasible for the Hop/Step/Jump.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, both broke their legs on landing. As Galen said, "Jumping has hurt many", noting elsewhere, "Sprinting has killed many a man." Ladas the Spartan dropped dead right after winning the long-distance event; two pentathletes expired while being crowned. Many big smash-ups in the chariot-races: in

one, 39 of 40 piled up. Pausanias blamed this toll on horse being spooked by a track mound called 'Horse-Scarer' – shades of Beecher's Brook.

Eight deaths are recorded in the three combat sports (boxing, wrestling, pancration – an 'extreme sport' where only eye-gouging and biting were no-nos). Here, no weight classifications, no rounds, no time limits. Just before he was throttled, Arrichion forced his opponent to surrender with an ankle-twist, hence was posthumously crowned. Dameranus ripped out Kreugas's innards – think what that ent(r)ails – being reasonably disqualified and his bloodily deceased rival getting the prize. A boxer's ideal was to retire with unmarked face – think Mohammad Ali; only one is so recorded. And, they knew nothing about concussions and other related traumas.

When Michael Phelps won his 13th individual gold medal, this finally surpassed Leonidas of Rhodes, who (164, 160, 156, 152 BC, final age 36) three times won the sprint, the double-lap, and the hoplitodromia, a race in full armour, about 400 metres (1,312ft), approximately 50lb (23kg) weight, carrying shield, in the blazing Greek summer. No surprise that – like Phelps – he was "almost worshipped as a god", and described by Philostratos (*Gymnastikos*, ch33) as making obsolete all previous theories of training and body types – see Jason König's YouTube lecture on this.

Pausanias (*Description of Greece*) catalogues the 200 winners' statues at Olympia – they also posted honours-board lists, one of which was found (1994) stuck down a latrine pipe; cf. Sofie Remisjen, *The End of Greek Athletics in Late Antiquity* (1994, p44).

These statues neither sweated blood nor wept (**FT145:18, 169:17**), though one of Theagenes fell on and killed a jealous ex-rival who nightly insulted it, and was promptly tried for murder and tossed into the sea.

What impresses most is the versatility of so many Greek athletes, unlike their modern specialising counterparts. Theagenes won boxing, pancration, and long-distance racing, competing in many other Games, notching in all 1,400 victories. Pausanias (read him in Peter Levi's magnificently annotated Penguin) has many such others.

Versatility of another kind was exhibited by Poulydamas, reputedly the strongest and tallest ever, who killed lions, ripped the hoof off a raging bull (*not* Robert de Niro), and could stop charging chariots with one hand. No wonder his Olympia statue was believed to cure fevers.

One competitor our Games are unlikely to feature is Damarchus (aka Demænetus), said by many writers from the sceptical Pausanias and Pliny (who sniffed "typical Greek credulity") to the more credulous Augustine (*City of God*, bk18 ch17) to have been a werewolf.

"Of all the evils afflicting Greece, none is worse than the tribe of athletes" – Euripides, *Antiope*, fr.441.

BIRDS' EYES IN THE SKIES

From eagle-like unmanned craft with flapping wings to drones that can suck up power by perching on electricity lines, bird-like spies are overhead says **DAVID HAMBLING**.

Like UFOs, information about classified drones can only be gleaned in the fragmentary reports from crashes and rare mentions in government documents. The recovering of a downed drone in Somalia suggests that a new era of surveillance is in full bloom, with spy drones now able to blend in as never before. Previously, unmanned aircraft like the Predator were obvious because of their unusual profile and persistent buzz; the new generation hide in plain sight by looking like birds.

The drone that was recovered in Mogadishu had a wingspan of about 7ft (2m), and was powered by two small propellers. The wings were entirely novel: although they did not provide propulsion, they were flexible and flapped in flight, enhancing the impression of a bird. We do not know who was operating the drone, though given the sophistication it seems unlikely that it was produced locally.

Spy drones disguised as birds have been a staple of science fiction and techno-thrillers for years. The current movie *Eye In The Sky* features a hummingbird-like drone for close-up reconnaissance. This is closely modelled on a real experimental drone, the Nano Air Vehicle produced by AeroVironment for DARPA in 2011. The NAV flew like a real bird by flapping its wings and suffered the same disadvantage of all such designs: extremely short battery life, with a flight time of only 11 minutes. Although pictures show the NAV painted in conspicuously bright colours, one of the main goals was to determine whether a drone could be successfully camouflaged as a bird. The project was shelved after the prototype, apparently due to the short flight time.

There have been many other bird-like unmanned air vehicles. As far back as 1965 the CIA launched a secret spy drone initiative known as Project Aquiline. The Agency wanted a plane that could fly missions over the Soviet Union without being spotted. It was possible to avoid radar by



ABOVE: DARPA's Nano Air Vehicle is designed to resemble a hummingbird.

BELOW: The raptor-like drone that crashed in Mogadishu had a wingspan of about 7ft and was powered by two small propellers.

keeping low, but any conventional aircraft would be obvious to human observers. Aquiline solved this with a drone that looked like an eagle or buzzard. It had an 8ft (2.4m) wingspan, and from a distance it could pass for a bird. Aquiline's modus operandi would be to fly at low level along communications lines, intercepting messages.

Aquiline was test-flown at the infamous Area 51. The most difficult part was landing: retrieval involved flying it into a net, and there were several crashes. What eventually sunk the programme was greed. Project manager John Meierdierck challenged the contractors McDonnell Douglas over their claims for the cost of the project. Classified programmes can be highly profitable, as there is far less scrutiny and financial oversight, but Meierdierck reckoned that McDonnell had inflated costs by a factor of 10. The contractors refused to back down and the project was cancelled.

More recently, US Special

Forces have been operating the hand-launched Maveric drone made by Priora Robotics. They had previously flown the Raven produced by AeroVironment, who made the hummingbird-like NAV. According to the makers, Maveric offers a major advantage, a "camouflaged bird-like profile," which, along with near-silent operation, makes it ideal for "covert intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance".



An even more bird-like spy drone showed up in Pakistan in 2011. From photographs posted online, this looked to be a modified version of Lockheed Martin's Desert Hawk with a paint job and feather-like extensions to mimic a vulture. This is a drone used by the US military, but deniability is one of the key advantages of using unmanned planes as spies. There is no way to confirm where they have come from or whom they are spying for.

The flapping-wing drone found in Mogadishu takes the imitation a step forward, and may be the hardest impostor to spot at present, but a more sophisticated

approach is under development: perching drones. The US Air Force has already given contracts to several firms and received prototype drones capable of landing on branches, power lines or flat surfaces.

One of these, made by Design Intelligence Incorporated, incorporated "biomimicry to achieve high levels of camouflage and concealment." This biomimicry – giving the appearance of a living thing – was achieved by having the drone look like an owl, "a type of bird found around the world," so it could blend in anywhere (though many people in cities might be quite surprised to find an owl perched outside their window).

Perching allows the drone to get a look at the target from close up and from a stable position, and is less conspicuous than circling overhead. The other advantage is energy harvesting. The drone can have solar cells, or circuits to suck up power from an electricity line it is perched on, so it can recharge and continue its mission for days, weeks or months. Prototypes were delivered in 2012 and the USAF has not commented on the Perching Micro Air Weapon programme since.

It seems that bird-like spies have passed seamlessly from the world of science fiction to reality; but of course the technology is not going to stop there. Back in the 1980s the CIA produced an experimental drone that looked like a dragonfly and flew by flapping its wings. This was gas-powered, directed by laser, and had a range of over 600ft (180m). Its sensor was a small microphone. As well as having the usual problems with battery life, it could not cope with crosswinds, and ended up in the CIA museum in McLean, Virginia.

If the CIA were to return to the idea of bugs that are literally bugs, advances in technology would make a modern dragonfly far more capable in terms of range, endurance and payload. There are now plenty of video cameras small enough for such a craft.

Secret spy planes, like the U-2 and SR-71, and the F-117 stealth fighter, historically accounted for a large proportion of UFO sightings. If such aircraft are superseded by bird-like craft, then the number of sightings will go down – and paranoia about being watched by birds or insects is likely to rise.



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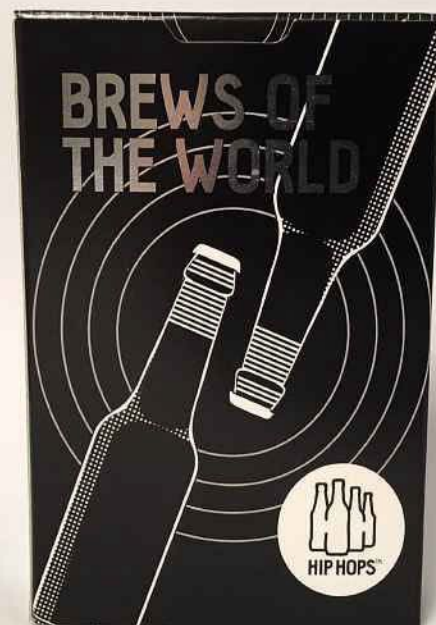
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GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE reminds us that ghostbusting sisters have long been doing it for themselves

The re-imagined *Ghostbusters* movie released over the summer did little to draw attention to serious psychical research, but did highlight the idea of women pursuing ghosts. In this respect art has taken a long time to catch up with life, as female involvement in ghost hunting goes back a long way – to the birth of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Unlike many scientific bodies and institutions of the time that were exclusively all-male affairs, women played a prominent role in the subject from the outset.

It has been long argued that mediumship was also one of the few areas in 19th century life where women could not only operate on equal terms, but actually exert superiority over male believers – see *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Victorian England* (1989) by Alex Owen. Female investigators of the period often crossed the boundary between researchers and research subjects. For example, the classicist Margaret Verrall (1851-1912) and her daughter Helen Verrall (1883-1959), later Mrs Salter, from Cambridge, who both produced automatic writing, also worked tirelessly for the SPR assessing cases.

Ghost hunting was in its infancy (in the Victorian era ghost hunts occurred more often in the séance room with the ghost coming to you), but there were also some female investigators prepared to deploy their own gifts as sensitives to explore haunted houses. However, the results were not always happy, as revealed by the career of Ada Goodrich Freer (1857-1931), one of the most fascinating, controversial and rather mysterious figures from the time. A prolific writer on psychic topics in the 1890s, often under the pseudonym 'Miss X', she claimed personal psychic gifts and charmed her way into the upper circles of the SPR, deeply impressing some of its leading and most aristocratic members. She also wrote for the magazine *Borderlands*, produced by spiritualist journalist and social reformer WT Stead. A collection of her essays covering spiritualism, dowsing, poltergeists, and parallels between the lives of the saints and phenomena being recorded by the SPR was generally well received, save for some comments on the American medium Mrs Piper.

Ada claimed an in-depth knowledge of crystal gazing, acquired not just from study of its history back to antiquity but her own personal experiments. As she confided to other researchers, these had led her to believe that she was psychically gifted and that "she was not only an accomplished



LEFT: Ada Goodrich Freer, psychic and psychical researcher, photographed in 1894. **BELOW:** The importance of mediumship for 19th century women is explored in Alex Owen's 1989 book.

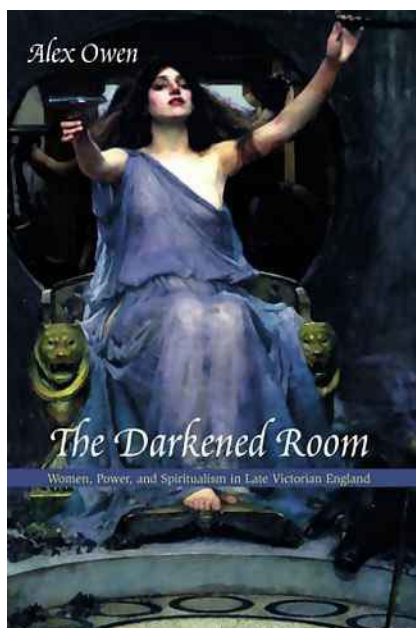
crystal-gazer, but also what, for want of a better name, we call a 'Seer'". She used a crystal ball, but insisted its size didn't matter, it was how you looked at it. Her own preferred method was to scry with one having the diameter of little more than a shilling, reached after extensive experiments to find the best reflective surface, ranging from optical instruments to Iceland spar.

Couching her experiences in the jargon of psychical research, images viewed with the crystal appeared objective. However, "The images were not actually existent in the crystal, but the crystal acted as suggestion and stimulus on images projected from one's own brain." These "crystal pictures" appeared to be projected to the outside of the crystal. She counselled that "One great difficulty experienced by persons experimenting in crystal-gazing was in focusing the eyes correctly. They should be directed to a point about half an inch below the surface of the crystal, to avoid disturbances caused by reflections, from the surface of the crystal, of the surrounding objects." (*Proceedings of the SPR*, 1888-89, v.5, pp.486 *et seq.*)

Ada didn't simply confine herself to experiments but was keen to record the visions of others, and to confront ghosts. In 1896 she investigated a haunting at Preston Manor, Brighton, Sussex, an 18th century building erected on the site of an earlier 13th century structure. Here Ada apparently presented herself as a spiritualist medium whilst investigating a mysterious 'Woman in White'. Experiments with a Ouija board resulted in purported communications emanating from two mediæval nuns, 'Caroline' and 'Agnes', hinting at secret crimes centuries before. Following these séances in January 1897, human remains were unearthed, and other historical details discovered which – at least for some – seemingly corroborated parts of the messages.

Encouraged, Ada progressed to investigating Ballechin House, Perthshire ('the Most Haunted House in Scotland') haunted by another phantom nun (this time named 'Ishbel' according to Ouija messages). Ada averred she had seen this figure for herself in the glen near the troubled house. She also glimpsed other human figures and phantom dogs, while guests and servants suffered their bedclothes pulled away, feelings of cold and the sensation of a presence. Ada's involvement seemingly acted as catalyst, rather like the arrival of Harry Price at Borley a

ADA AVERRED SHE HAD SEEN THE PHANTOM NUN FOR HERSELF

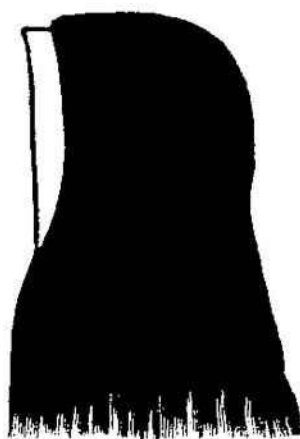


generation later. Like Borley Rectory, Ballechin House had the reputation of being haunted (mostly by weird noises) for years prior to Ada's visits, although there was little first-hand evidence for visual phantasms prior to 1897. Everyone agreed the building was troubled by strange, mostly nocturnal sounds, but it did stand in a seismically active area.

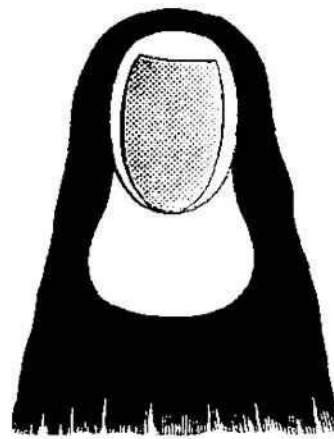
This was an early case where the researchers brought in equipment, such as a phonograph and seismograph, for recording physical manifestations. Unfortunately, these instruments were only deployed very late in the investigation, and when the team of SPR researchers received unfavourable publicity in *The Times*, the Society, fearing a public relations disaster, backed away. Nonetheless, Ada stayed with the case, publishing a book with John, Marquess of Bute: *The Alleged Haunting of — House, including a journal kept during the tenancy of Colonel Le Mesurier Taylor* (1899), seen as a forerunner of the Price books on Borley Rectory 40 years later.

Her book was not well received, with Ada standing accused of exaggerating both her own experiences and those of others. The editor of the *SPR Journal* reflected the cooling attitude towards her by running a scathing critical review by SPR resident sceptic Frank Podmore, who attacked the approach taken.

Regarding the ghostly nun (another Borley parallel) Podmore resurrected Ada's crystal experiments to discredit her. Although declaring: "I intend nothing in derogation of Miss Freer's moral and intellectual qualifications," he dismissed her testimony "because she is liable, in a quite unusual degree, to hallucinatory experience, and because many of her hallucinations, as she has herself shown in her article on Crystal



a



b

ABOVE: Sketches of 'Ishbel' the phantom nun of Ballechin House, Perthshire, from Ada's 1899 book.

Vision, are purely subjective, being merely the recrudescence of previous sensory or intellectual experiences." This is a bit like arguing because you see things in your dreams at night, your waking vision is not to be trusted either.

Podmore implied Ada transferred her visions to others by suggestion, stating: "It was Miss Freer who first saw a ghostly figure; it was again Miss Freer who first heard ghostly noises, and throughout these records it is Miss Freer who is most frequently and most conspicuously favoured with 'phenomena'. Ultimately, whilst acknowledging that "Miss Freer has shown that she knows how to observe clearly and how to record accurately," he declared "her testimony in a matter of this kind carries very little weight" and the case

was "unimpressive".

As always, issuing armchair criticisms is easier than undertaking field research, though to his credit Podmore had taken some trouble to visit poltergeist-shattered homes (unlike the legions of sceptics in the generations who have breezily declare that ghosts don't exist but have never been to look). Indeed, Podmore's critique of poltergeist reports published in 1896 easily remains the best and most detailed sceptical examination yet written. But his criticisms were not a surprise, as Podmore, once a believer, had renounced spiritualism. On a more basic level, there is also textual evidence suggesting deep down Podmore just simply didn't like women.

Seeking another outlet for her talents in Scotland, Ada then embarked upon an enquiry



ABOVE: The exterior and interior of Ballechin House, investigated by Ada Goodrich Freer when it was considered by some "the Most Haunted House in Scotland".

into ghost-seeing in the Highlands and Islands, collecting testimony from crofters and fishermen. Sponsored by Lord Bute, she headed to the Hebrides and South Uist. She was not impressed, writing in 1902: “Nowhere in our proud Empire was there a spot more desolate, grim, hopelessly poverty-stricken, a wilderness of rock and of standing water, on which in summer golden lichen and spreading water-lilies mocked the ghastly secrets of starvation and disease.” Yet it was within the wretched huts of locals “hardly to be distinguished from the peat stacks beside them” that amazing stories of visions and prophetic phantoms could be gleaned. Or so she claimed, for much later she was found to have plagiarised the work of Father Allan Macdonald, a Roman Catholic priest on the Isle of Eriskay, who gathered an astounding collection of folklore involving apparitions and death warnings from his congregation before his death in 1905.

Her expropriation of the much-loved priest's work was a subject of local gossip for years but only fully exposed in 1958 by Dr John Campbell, a Celtic and Gaelic scholar, living on the Inner Hebrides, who published his findings in ‘The Late Fr. Allan McDonald, Miss Goodrich Freer, and Hebridean Folklore’ in *Scottish Studies* (1958) v.2, p.175.

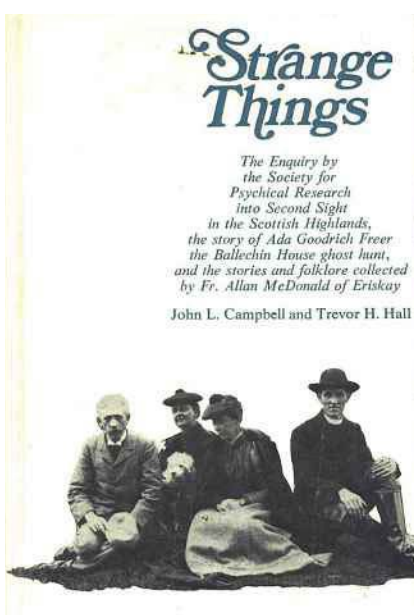
In 1907 amid rumours of involvement with fraudulent séances, Ada quit psychical research and the SPR omitted reference to her works thereafter. Ada married a Dr Spoer, reducing her age by 17 years on official documents (she was blessed with looking much younger than her actual years) and moving first to Jerusalem and eventually dying in New York in 1931.

In the mid-1960s, sceptic Trevor Hall, who embarked on a literary crusade against many of the founders of psychical research, turned his basilisk glare on Ada, producing two hostile biographies: *Strange Things* (1968) and *The Strange Case of Ada Goodrich Freer* (1980). With Ada Goodrich Freer he was somewhat curbed in *Strange Things* by collaboration with Dr Campbell, but he delighted in exposing how Miss Freer had exaggerated and distorted her early life and ancestors. A more impartial view emerged from researcher Guy Lambert, who admitted that Ada had romanced a good deal about her ancestors and the kind of society she was born into. Precisely how she acquired her education, deportment and charming manners and graces, which commended her to those with whom she dealt, remained something of a mystery, but as Lambert considered, “one is hardly justified in writing her down as a complete adventuress, whose word cannot be trusted on any topic, including her own subjective experience”. A more balanced treatment is surely deserved; indeed it is a project I will hopefully pursue in 2017.

Turning to modern hauntings, after numerous stories of ghosts in mundane and unexceptional urban buildings, it is a refreshing change to actually learn of manifestations in an ancient castle. According to the Welsh *Daily News* (17 July 2016), ghostly activity is continuing at Gwydir Castle,



JO TURNER / CREATIVE COMMONS



“SOME CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN TOUCHED ON THE SHOULDER”

Llanwrst in Conwy, first labelled as ‘haunted’ in the 19th century when sightings were at a peak, including a servant girl and a former owner, ‘Sir John’. However, Peter Welford and Judy Corbett, who bought the 15th century building in 1994, are quoted as saying: “Many people continue to feel, see and even smell a range of paranormal things here, which are always uncannily consistent in terms of location and recorded experiences.”

Regarding the ghost of an old woman in grey, Judy said: “The apparition has not specifically been seen in recent years, [but] its presence continues to be felt and some claim to have been touched on the shoulder whilst at the same time experiencing a considerable drop in temperature.”

I have to say that if the proliferation of

ghosts at Gwydir Castle were all claimed at once, the situation would remind me of the extraordinary claims made at a certain haunted house in Dorset investigated by Tom Perrott in the 1960s and later mostly discounted. However, this fading away of apparitions over the centuries is a pattern identified by Andrew Green. Ghosts, it seems, are not immortal but have a kind of ‘half-life’ of between 250 and 400 years. Green highlighted a case where in the 18th century a ghost of a woman in red shoes, a red gown and a black headdress was observed in a little-visited corridor of a mansion. Many years passed before the apparition was seen again, and by then, (perhaps because the original full description of the ghost was not then known) it appeared as a female in a pink dress, pink shoes and grey headdress. Not witnessed again until the mid-19th century, the figure had by then dwindled down to “a lady in a white gown and with grey hair”. Just before World War II, all that was reported was “the sound of a woman walking along the corridor and the swish of her dress”. In 1971, shortly before the demolition of the property, workmen “felt a presence in one of the old corridors”. In another case in Scotland an apparition originally reported as dressed in green seemed to have faded to yellow by 1905 and was reported by the 1970s to be ‘the colour of ripe corn’. (See *Phantom Ladies*, 1976; *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide*, 1973, 2016).

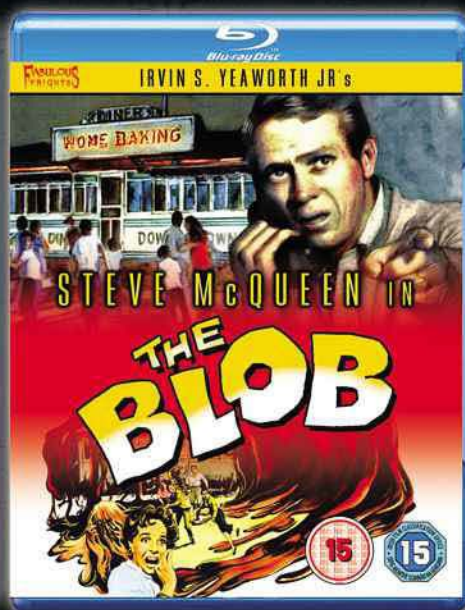
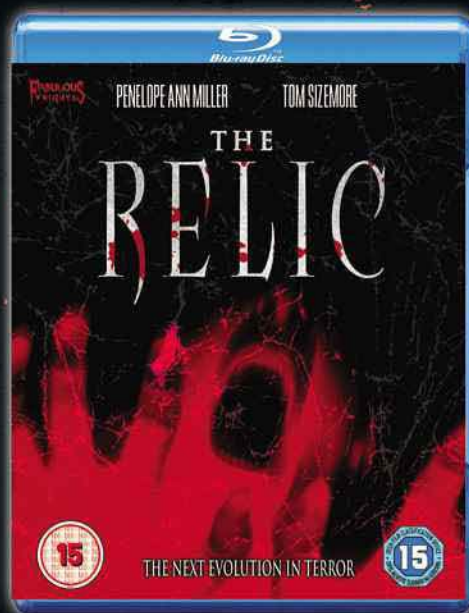
Other Gwydir phenomena allegedly include hearing children crying, a ghost wolfhound, “a short Elizabethan lady in a yellow dress” in the garden, and “a torch-lit procession... seen at night on the Great Terrace”. If true, closer examination is surely needed.

However, despite this airing of the haunted charms of Gwydir, I think it won’t be until winter that they attract the visitors and tourists they deserve. Currently, the most-read news story for the *Daily News* is: ‘Where are the Nudist Beaches in North Wales?’.

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Forged papyrus leads to Jesus's "hotwife", plus severed feet and new Stonehenge finds

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS'S WIFE [FT294:4]



At a conference in Rome on 18 September 2012, Prof Karen King, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School and a prominent New Testament scholar, announced the existence of a papyrus fragment with a text in (Egyptian) Sahidic Coptic appearing to offer evidence that Jesus was married. The faded fragment, 4cm by 8cm (1.6in x 3.1in), has a text scattered across 14 incomplete lines, translated as follows: "not [to] me. My mother gave to me li[fe]"; "The disciples said to Jesus"; "deny. Mary is worthy of it"; "Jesus said to them, My wife"; "she will be able to be my disciple"; "Let wicked people swell up"; "As for me, I dwell with her in order to"; "an image"; "my moth[er]"; "three"; and "forth which". Though Prof King called the fragment "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife", she emphasised that the text didn't prove that Jesus was married or that, if he were, that his wife was Mary Magdalene – only that "some early Christians had a tradition that Jesus was married". In any case, it was welcome news for fans of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and Dan Brown's notorious pot-boiler.

Almost immediately after Prof King's announcement, the Vatican newspaper labelled the papyrus "an inept forgery". Some experts in papyrology and Coptic linguistics attested to its authenticity; other begged to differ. In April 2014, Harvard announced the results of carbon-dating tests, multispectral imaging, and other lab analyses: the papyrus appeared to be of ancient origin – between AD 659 and 859, or possibly earlier – and the ink had no obviously modern ingredients. However, the text itself was tracked down to an interlinear translation of the *Gospel of Thomas* published online in 2002. Phrases from this



ABOVE: The fragment of papyrus turned out to be "an inept forgery", the work of a German pornographer called Walter Fritz.

had been lifted and chopped up to make the phrases in the fragment, something that showed up in a very unusual word-break, and one of the words had a missing letter that was found only in the PDF description. Furthermore, the lettering was suspiciously splotchy, the grammar poor.

A wonderfully persistent researcher called Ariel Sabar has now traced the papyrus's provenance and in June 2016 published his findings in *The Atlantic* magazine. The forger turned out to be Walter Fritz, a smooth-talking German living in Florida, who contacted Prof King in 2011, showing her the papyrus and requesting help in its translation and authentication. He claimed to have bought it and five other Coptic papyri from Hans-Ulrich Laukamp in Florida in 1999. The latter had allegedly acquired them in East Germany in 1963. Laukamp was a rather simple-minded alcoholic who died in 2002. His relatives denied he ever possessed any papyri, and also insisted he was in West Berlin in 1963, unable to cross over to the Communist side, and was in Germany attending his dying wife when Fritz claimed to have bought the papyri from him

in Florida.

Fritz studied at the Free University in Berlin around 1988, took a job as a tour guide at Berlin's Egyptian Museum, backpacked around Egypt, and studied Coptic. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, he blagged his way into the directorship of a new museum of East German history in the old Stasi HQ in East Berlin in about October 1991, but disappeared in the Spring of 1992 after exhibits started to go missing. He then popped up in Florida as a director of an auto-parts company. Sabar discovered that Fritz bought the domain name *gospelofjesuswife.com* on 26 Aug 2012, more than three weeks before Prof King publicised the papyrus. Confronted with the revelations concerning Fritz, Prof King has now admitted that the fragment is a forgery.

In 2003 Fritz had launched a series of pornographic websites that showcased his wife having sex with other men – often more than one at a time. One home page billed her as "America's #1 Slut Wife." There was no charge, but the men had to agree to Walt's filming. The couple's work belonged to a fetish genre called "hotwife", built around

fantasies of cuckolded husbands powerless to stop their wives' lust for other men. Sabar reported: "On one of his wife's sites... passages from Goethe, Proust, and Edna St. Vincent Millay are interspersed with philosophical musings on Jesus's teachings, the slippery nature of reality, and 'the Perfection of Sluthood.'" She also would babble in a language Fritz supposed to be Aramaic while they were having sex. She herself claimed that she had been a clairvoyant since the age of 17, and had been instructed by angels to do everything she subsequently did. *Int. NY Times*, 11 April 2014; *Live Science*, 25 Aug 2015; *Catholic Herald* online, 17 June 2016; *Church Times*, 3 July 2015, 24 June 2016..

SEVERED FEET [FT289:20]



Twelve severed human feet in trainers washed up in the Pacific northwest between 2007 and 2012 – nine in

British Columbia and three in Washington State. Most of the people to whom the feet belonged were eventually

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

105: TIME OFF



ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Inmates in British prisons can have their sentences reduced, provided they keep their noses clean while they're inside.

The "truth"

Despite the popularity of the phrase, there is in fact no such thing in UK law as "Time off for good behaviour." When you're sentenced by the court you receive a conditional release date (the earliest date on which the custodial element of your sentence can end), and no amount of snitching, toadying, ostentatious religious observance, doing extra shifts in the laundry, or attending rehabilitative training courses can bring that date forward by so much as a day. Although time served cannot be reduced by good behaviour, it can be extended by bad behaviour: a disciplinary hearing, known as an adjudication, has the power to add to your time in custody.

Sources

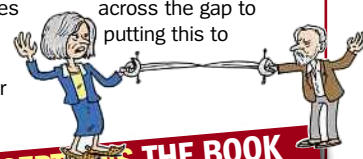
www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org/index.php/release-date; <http://blogs.channel4.com/factcheck/factcheck-why-did-huhne-and-pryce-get-out-early/13440>

Disclaimer

If any legal experts, on either side of the wall, wish to appeal against these findings, please do so via the letters column.

Mythchaser

It is generally known that the two front benches in the House of Commons are two swords' lengths apart, and that this is by design, so as to stop opposing politicians stabbing each other in the front. This is so well known that it forms part of the spiel of official tourist guides and appears in authoritative books and websites. But it can't possibly be true, can it? For a start, when were MPs last allowed to carry swords in the chamber? And has the width of the gangway always been the same, through the House's various rebuilds? And, perhaps above all, are we to suppose that those of Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet rank are too lazy to lunge, too corruptly corpulent to be capable of staggering a few paces across the gap to run their opponents through? I'm not the vote; instead, can anyone provide proper proof either way, for the Ayes or the Noes?



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identified; most were suicide victims. Since then, the severed foot phenomenon has moved to the UK. On 19 February 2016, dog walkers stumbled upon a left foot on top of bramble bushes in Weston Park East, Bath. It was severed about 4in (10cm) above the ankle and looked as if it had been unearthed. After finding very little DNA, police said it appeared that the foot had been 'fixed' or preserved with chemicals. Dr Heather Bonney, a forensic anthropologist at the Natural History Museum in London, said the state of the bones suggested the foot came from an adult, but there was no way of knowing the sex, age or ancestry. She added there was no evidence of any injury or disease and the item was "entirely consistent with being either a medical, anatomical or museum specimen."

On 4 July, a second left foot turned up in undergrowth in the back garden of a property in Weston Park, a few hundred yards from where the first foot was found. Then on 3 August, a third foot was found in the garden of a property on Cranwells Park, adjacent to the park where the first two feet appeared. Whether this one is a left or right foot has not been reported. Det Insp Paul Catton of Avon and Somerset Police said he "strongly believed" the feet had originated from "an old private collection". Police believe animals had unearthed the feet – or disturbed the location where they were stored.

Meanwhile in Wales: on 5 April a tourist stumbled upon a severed human foot on Tal Y Foel beach near Dwyran, Anglesey. DNA tests showed it belonged to Richard Thomas, 47, who had gone missing from his Bangor home on 31 December 2013. Foul



play was not suspected. *express.co.uk*, 5 April; *BBC News*, 18 May, 3 June, 5 July; *Bristol Post*, 19 May, 5 Aug; *plymouthherald.co.uk*, 6 Aug 2016.

SUPERHENGE [FT333:16]



In 2014, researchers found the remains of 17 new chapels and hundreds of other archaeological

features scattered across the 4.6 square mile (12km²) ritual landscape of Salisbury Plain around Stonehenge. Then in September 2015, ground-penetrating radar at Durrington Walls, a roundish landscape feature constructed around 2500 BC less than two miles from Stonehenge, appeared to show that the straight edge was aligned over a row of up to 90 standing stones – about 30 still intact – that once stood 15ft (4.6m) high, and formed one side of a C-shaped arena. However, a limited excavation found no megaliths. "We are certain we do not have any stones," said Dr Nicola Snashall, National Trust archaeologist. "What we have instead are at least 120 pits that were created to take great big timber posts. We think there may have been as many as 200 or even more as we have some gaps in the ground penetrating radar data... [The pits] have ramps at the sides to lower posts into. They did contain timbers which have been vertically lifted out and removed at some stage. The top was then filled in with chalk rubble and the giant henge bank was raised over the top." The current speculation is that the giant timber monument was erected before the Stonehenge construction crew had begun living at the site. Once they moved in, they took out the timbers and put up an enormous bank and ditch, which remain today. Previous excavations on the site have revealed seven houses and it has been suggested up to 4,000 people could have lived within the village. *BBC News*, *D.Mail online*, 12 Aug; *D.Telegraph*, 13 Aug 2016.

STREWTH: IT'S PELTING PERCH!

Teleportation, aerial distribution or simply the urge to merge? PAUL CROPPER investigates recent fish falls in western Queensland.



ABOVE LEFT: A fish in front of Nicola White's house. ABOVE RIGHT: A perch from Cyndi McQueen's dirt track. BELOW: A selection of grunters at the Oakhills' cattle station.

Fish falls are a forteen favourite, and feature regularly in FT's pages. Australia has a rich history of such cases. Naturalist Gilbert Whitely published a summary of 50 Australian reports in 1972¹ and in the January 1998 issue of FT Tony Healy and I highlighted several modern cases and suggested some explanations for the phenomenon, including distribution by whirlwinds and even teleportation.² Recent reports from western Queensland, however, suggest an earthbound explanation for at least some of the sudden appearances of fish in the arid outback.

The amount of rain that fell across western Queensland on the evening of Tuesday, 9 March 2016 was truly extraordinary: Winton, a small sheep and cattle town, recorded its wettest 24 hours in 16 years, and over 75mm fell on 'Bernfels', a large cattle station northwest of the town. For owners Tahnee and Ross Oakhill, the rain was a welcome surprise as 'Bernfels' had been suffering a drought for almost four years.

Even more surprising was the sight that greeted Ross as he stepped outside next morning: along a 100m length of gravel road he found a dozen small fish, all alive and wriggling. Baffled, the Oakhills posted their story on social media, and soon their photos were attracting national and international attention.

When I contacted them a week later, the young couple were happy to discuss the amazing event. While they hadn't actually seen the

fish fall, they were sure they must have dropped from the sky as the nearest body of water, their dam, was a kilometre away. A creek bed behind the house had been bone-dry from one year's end to the next.

The Oakhills' story prompted other locals to come forward with their experiences. On the same muddy morning, Nicola White from 'Clio', 12 miles (20km) from 'Bernfels', found four small, live fish in front of her house. Another neighbour, Cyndi McQueen, found fish on one of her dirt tracks.

Armed with the Oakhill, White and McQueen reports and photos, I approached one of Australia's leading ichthyologists, Jeff Johnson of the Queensland Museum. He quickly identified the fish in all three cases: spangled perch, *Leiopotherapon unicolor*. The spangled perch (aka 'spangled grunter') is one of the most widespread and common freshwater fish species in Australia.

Jeff outlined to me his theory of what had happened at Winton:

When it [a reported fish fall] involves spangled perch, by far the most common reason is this species has an incredible urge to disperse and breed when large rain events occur. They may have been trapped for years in cramped waterholes, dams, rivers, or creeks and will seize the opportunity to furiously swim up temporary flows during heavy rain in a desperate attempt to disperse. This often leads them many miles up blind gullies, wheel tracks, or just meandering overland flows and when the rain eases many



are left stranded in places seemingly impossible to reach from the nearest permanent water. Of course very few residents are actually out in the teeming rain to see this happening.

Does Jeff's 'Randy Road-Runner' theory fit the facts of the Winton falls? Pretty closely. In all three locations the fish were spangled perch, found on relatively flat surfaces that could have supported high temporary water flows linking existing populations of the hardy little 'grunters' with their final resting place. In one of the McQueens' photos, the surface water is still clearly evident. No fish were seen falling or found on roofs or in gutters on any of the three properties.

But while the Winton fish falls seems to have a simple cause, can all Australian cases be wrapped up so easily? Many other Australian cases do involve spangled perch and many of the fish are found on flat ground or near rutted roads, so perhaps the majority of cases

are quite easily explained by the "rapid dispersal" theory.

So is aerial distribution just a myth? I don't think so. Even Jeff Johnson believes that distribution of fish via whirlwinds is rare, but certainly not impossible. Some other cases in my Australian file, in fact, involve fish found in roof gutters and other elevated places, and several witnesses claim to have actually seen fish fall.

One such person is an older Winton resident John East who wrote to me recently with this story:

I have just read an article in the Longreach Leader where you have asked for information regarding "Fish From The Sky". My wife and I are well into our 80s and lived on a property in the Winton district for much of our lives. During that time we experienced fish falling from the sky during heavy rain on at least two occasions. On the last occasion we saw them falling and bouncing off 200-litre drums and tanks. They were only about five or six centimetres long and looked like little perch. There was not any waterhole or creek close to the area. The above experience convinced me that the fish came from the sky in the rain.

When the next major rainstorm approaches Winton, I think many residents will still be watching the skies.

NOTES

¹ *The Australian Naturalist*, March 1972.

² "It's Raining Sprats and Cods!" **FT106:34-36**, Jan 1988. See also **FT262:24-25** and **315:5**.

A² ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents
his regular round-up from
the cryptozoological
garden

GREGOR FISCHER / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Was the legendary Hungarian fisher pig a local variety of the European wild boar or a feral pig?

THE HUNGARIAN FISHER PIG

Whereas Arthurian legend had its Fisher King, rural Hungarian lore once included an ostensibly real but presently unidentified beast known as the fisher pig. Also termed the swamp pig, this hitherto-obscure creature, seemingly undocumented in mainstream cryptozoological literature, was kindly brought to my attention by Hungarian crypto-investigator Orosz István via a series of Facebook communications in July 2016, which can be summarised as follows.

The old shepherding folk of his country still speak of this mysterious animal, which they claim to be extinct (allegedly dying out during the 1880-1890s, according to famous Hungarian agricultural writer Imre Somogyi in his celebrated 1942 book *Kertmagyarország Felé*), but which once lived in marshes around the rivers Tisza and Körös. It did not graze like normal wild boars, its diet consisting of crabs and fishes. Orosz was not aware of any illustrations, but added that it was said to be very big, with a curved back, and that it lived in large herds. He felt that it was probably nothing more than a local variety of the European wild boar *Sus scrofa*, whereas fellow Hungarian crypto-enthusiast Tötös Miklós considered that it might have been a feral (run-wild) variety of domestic pig.

Both wild boars and feral domestic pigs will indeed inhabit swamps and marshes, are famously omnivorous, and are known to enter shallow water to devour fishes and invertebrates. Yet as wild boars and feral domestic pigs are such familiar creatures in this region of Europe, why would any that lived in the Tisza and Körös marshes be delineated with their own name by the local shepherds, unless they had evolved a distinctive morphology and lifestyle that readily separated them from more typical wild boar and ferals, at least in the eyes of the shepherds (if not in those of zoologists)? I'd be very interested to learn more about the fisher pig of Hungary (a country already famous

cryptozoologically for its equally enigmatic reedwolf). Perhaps somewhere in one of Hungary's many long-established hunting lodges there is a trophy head or a bristly pelt from one of these perplexing porcines. *Orosz István and Tötös Miklós, pers. comms, 3 July 2016.*

WALLACE'S FORGOTTEN FISH

Over 160 years ago, while exploring the Negro, a Brazilian tributary of the mighty Amazon River, English naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (Charles Darwin's co-discoverer of the evolutionary mechanism of natural selection) encountered a small but distinctive specimen of freshwater stingray, which he duly collected and sketched.

Familiar to the local Indians, who refer to it as the *raia cururu* or toad ray due to the similarity of its dorsal surface's coloration and patterning to that of the cane toad *Rhinella marina* that also exists in this locality, it subsequently became, and remains, familiar to tropical fish fanciers in the Western world, as numerous specimens were exported to Europe and North America. Moreover, many illustrations of it are reproduced in both the scientific and the aquarium fish literature. It is therefore remarkable that it has only now been recognised as a distinct species, formally described in a *Zootaxa* paper in June 2016. Consistently misidentified with various known rays in the past, this 'new' species has been officially dubbed *Potamotrygon wallacei*, Wallace's ray, in honour of its long-deceased discoverer (Wallace died in 1913). http://agencia.fapesp.br/freshwater_stingray_discovered_by_alfred_wallace_over_160_years_ago_is_described/23464/ 29 June 2016; <http://biotaxa.org/Zootaxa/article/view/zootaxa.4107.4.5>

A LOST FLYCATCHER

Despite having been overlooked taxonomically for such a long time, at least Wallace's ray has not suffered the sad fate of another very belated discovery. During the 20th century, there had been occasional sightings on the Galapagos island of San Cristóbal of a small vermillion flycatcher, but this was assumed to be the same species as those found elsewhere in the Galapagos archipelago, which in turn were assumed to be the same species as the vermillion flycatchers native to nearby Ecuador (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*).

These assumptions were dramatically disproved following a chance encounter with one such bird by San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory biologist Dr Alvaro Jaramillo, visiting the Galapagos in 2007. He realised that its song was totally different from that of Ecuadorian vermillion flycatchers, and as such birds are born with a preset melody, lacking the ability to create new songs themselves, this suggested that the Galapagos vermillions constituted a separate species. Consequently, assisted by fellow researcher Ore Carmi, he conducted an extensive DNA-based comparative study of museum specimens of Galapagos and Ecuadorian vermillions. Sure enough, the Galapagos specimens' DNA profile was distinct enough for them to be recognised as a separate species, which has now been dubbed *P. nanus*.

But that is not all. During their studies, Jaramillo and Carmi also found that vermillion specimens collected in earlier times from the island of San Cristóbal were sufficiently distinct from those inhabiting other Galapagos islands to be categorised as a second valid species, unique to San Cristóbal. So this hitherto 'invisible' species has now been named *P. dubius*. Sadly, however, Jaramillo's ostensibly upbeat tale of discovery does not have a happy ending. Apparently always rare, the San Cristóbal vermillion flycatcher has not been seen since 1987, and is feared extinct – a species lost to the world before the world even realised that it was a species. <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/extinction-countdown/first-bird-extinction-galapagos/> 14 June 2016; www.audubon.org/news/this-new-species-went-extinct-it-was-even-discovered 5 July 2016.



ABOVE: A colourful male vermillion flycatcher, *Pyrocephalus rubinus*.

CHARLES J SHARP



OLDEST ANIMALS

RESEARCH HAS REVEALED THAT GREENLAND SHARKS COULD LIVE UP TO 400 YEARS; PLUS MORE ANIMAL OLDIES WORTH CELEBRATING

- Greenland sharks are now the longest-living vertebrates known on Earth. The discovery places their lifespan far ahead of the oldest elephant in captivity, Lin Wang, who died aged 86 and the official record for humans, held by Frenchwoman Jeanne Louise Calment (122 years and 164 days). Researchers – led by Julius Nielsen, a marine biologist from the University of Copenhagen – found that the sharks grow just one centimetre a year, and reach sexual maturity at about the age of 150. Radiocarbon dating showed that one female was about 400 years old. The former vertebrate record-holder was a bowhead whale estimated to be 211 years old [FT230:12]; but if invertebrates are brought into the longevity competition, a 507-year-old Icelandic clam called Ming holds the title of most aged animal.

Greenland sharks, one of the world's largest carnivores, can grow up to 24ft (7.3m) and are found, swimming no more than 1.7mph (2.7km/h), throughout the cold waters of the North Atlantic at depths of around 1,800ft (550m). With this leisurely pace of life and sluggish growth rate, they were thought to live for a long time. While the ages of many fish can be determined by counting the growth layers of calcium carbonate 'stones' found in their ears – in a manner somewhat similar to counting tree rings – sharks do not have such earstones. What's more, Greenland sharks lack other calcium-rich tissues suitable for this type of analysis. Until now, determining their ages had been impossible, but the researchers found a way.

"The Greenland shark's eye lens is composed of a specialised material – and

it contains proteins that are metabolically inert," explained Mr Nielsen. "This means that after the proteins have been synthesised in the body, they are not renewed any more, so we can isolate the tissue that formed when the shark was a pup, and do radiocarbon dating." The team looked at 28 sharks, collected as by-catch during scientific surveys between 2010 and 2013. Using this technique, they established that the largest shark – a 16ft-long female – was between 272 and 512 years old (born between 1504 and 1744), but most likely somewhere in the middle, so about 400 years old (born c. 1616). "Even with the lowest part of this uncertainty, 272 years, even if that is the maximum age, it should still be considered the longest-living vertebrate," said Mr Nielsen. Conversely, if her age is at the upper end of the scale, she may have out-lived Ming the clam. *Science, Guardian online, 11 Aug; BBC News, Times, 12 Aug 2016.*

- In 2006, as part of a study into climate change, scientists from the Bangor University School of Ocean Sciences dredged up about 200 ocean quahogs, a type of deep-sea clam, from the Atlantic sea floor off the coast of Iceland. Tests were conducted on the shells to determine their age. As the shells grow at different rates at different times of the year, distinct layers can be counted like tree rings. One 3.5in (9cm) quahog turned was initially thought to be 405 years old and was promptly dubbed 'Ming', after the Chinese dynasty in power when it was born. This was

32 years older than the previous oldest recorded creature, another ocean quahog, whose shell is now in a German museum. Unfortunately, by the time its age had been established, Ming was dead – its flesh had been thrown away and only its shell remained. Of course, it is not known how much longer Ming might have lived had it been left in place on the ocean floor.

In 2013, another assessment of Ming's age was carried out counting bands that were measured on the sectioned surface of the outer shell margin rather than the hinge; and the result confirmed by comparing the banding patterns with those on other clams that were alive at the same time. This determined Ming was 507 years old when caught – 134 years older than the German specimen. The revised age estimate was also supported by carbon-14 dating. "We got it wrong the first time and maybe we were a bit hasty publishing our findings back then," said Paul Butler, an ocean scientist from Bangor University. "But we are absolutely certain that we've got the right age now." *Sunday Times, 28 Oct; D.Mail, 29 Oct 2007; Independent, 16 Nov 2013.*

- The oldest cat in the world today might be 31-year-old Nutmeg, who lives with Liz and Ian Finlay in Blaydon, Tyne and Wear. The couple regularly feed Nutmeg treats including tuna, cream and hot roast chicken, and the old chap has his own room. Nutmeg became the Finlays' pet in 1990. Spice, their other cat, kept bringing home a stray friend, and the childless couple decided to adopt the tabby. A vet judged him then to be five years old. "Nutmeg is like a lovable old grandpa," said Mrs Finlay. "He is very gentle. He has changed as he has got older, just like humans do. He is grumpier now and his meow is more like a growl." *D.Express, 29 June 2016.*

- According to Guinness World Records, a Siamese cat called Scooter celebrated his 30th birthday in Mansfield, Texas, on 26 March 2016, making him officially the world's oldest living cat. "He likes to see new places and he likes people," said his owner, Gail Floyd. He grew accustomed to accompanying her, and travelled to 45 of the 50 US states. Ms Floyd said that as a kitten, he liked to play in her hair and got used to riding on her shoulder, going with her wherever she went. He would wake her up every morning at 6am, "talking" and



ABOVE: A Greenland shark enjoys a leisurely pace of life. INSET: 507-year-old Ming went to meet its maker.



ABOVE: (left-right) Poncho the 90-year-old macaw; Missan the Swedish moggy, who may have turned 30; Pat the African penguin, who passed away last December aged 37.

jumping around, and was always waiting by the door when she arrived home from work. He enjoyed getting blow-dried after a bath and his favourite food was chicken, which he was given every other day.

- The all-time Guinness champion is Creme Puff, a Texas cat that died on 6 August 2005 aged 38 years and three days. Scooter died sometime before 8 April, whereupon the title passed to tabby Corduroy, 27, from Sisters, Oregon (born 1 Aug 1989) – but should it really go to Nutmeg? Or maybe to 30-year-old Henry, a ginger tom, living with Sally Brown in Norwich? Mrs Brown, 48, a veterinary nurse, got Henry as an eight or nine-week-old kitten from a rescue centre in March 1986. She feeds him on a Swedish cat food called Husse made from natural chemical-free ingredients. He also has treats of chicken and fish several times a week. Mrs Brown has 15 cats, of which several others have reached a ripe old age: 24, 19 and 18. “Henry’s sight is starting to fail now and he’s had a few teeth out, but in all that time he’s never had any illnesses,” she said. *USA Today*, 16 Aug 2015; [CNN] 10 May; (Portsmouth) News, 12 May; Sunday Post, 18 May; D.Mail, 31 May 2016.

- Three other aged moggies should get a mention. In February 2015 came news of a farm cat called Missan aged 29, due to turn 30 “this spring”. In the absence of a death notice, we presume Missan still walks among us. Owner Åsa Wickberg, from Karlskoga, southern Sweden, found her as an abandoned kitten in 1985, and the family dog adopted her as one of her own. A tabby called Tammy, living with Anna Gough in Macclesfield, was

born on 18 March 1990, making her 26. And 25-year-old Mummy Cat, living with Bran Parker in Hindlip, Worcestershire, was shot in the abdomen and the face last June, causing her to lose an eye. One of the pellets was so close to her brain that a vet was obliged to put her down. *The Local (Sweden)*, 22 Feb 2015; Sun, 14 April; D.Mail, 7 June 2016.

- Britain’s oldest dog was mauled to death while out on a morning walk on 1 August. Jack, a 25-year-old Yorkshire terrier, was bitten in a sudden and savage attack by a black Lakeland terrier near his home on Teesside. Ray Bunn, 70, Jack’s owner, said he had just taken him out of the car and was putting his lead on when “the dog just came out of nowhere and grabbed Jack on his side.” Mr Bunn tried to fight the rogue dog off and put an end to the mauling. “I punched it, but it was about three minutes before it let go,” he said. Jack died on the way to the vet.

Claims have been made for Max, a 29-year-old mixed terrier from Louisiana, but his date of birth can’t be confirmed. The same goes for Bella, a Labrador cross from Derbyshire, whose owners believed she was 29, but because she was a rescue dog, her precise age couldn’t be determined. The oldest dog ever recorded was an Australian cattle dog named Bluey, who lived for 29 years and five months before being put to sleep on 14 November 1939. *D.Telegraph*, 17 Dec 2015 + 3 Aug 2016; D.Mail, 3 July, 17 Dec 2015 + 2 Aug 2016.

- A sheep called Dolly, living on the South Downs, turned 23 last year and was thought to be the world’s oldest. Sharon Moore was looking after her at Moore Racehorse Trust in

Westmeston, East Sussex. Sheep usually live to about 10 or 12. The oldest known one died in 1989 aged 28. In 2012, the then oldest was killed falling off a cliff on the Isle of Lewis a month short of 26. Sun, 16 Mar 2015.

- An African penguin called Pat, thought to be the oldest such bird in Britain and the second oldest in Europe, died last December aged 37. She was put down by vets in Torquay, Devon, because of her arthritis. Pat hatched at Paignton Zoo in 1978 but moved to Living Coasts in 2003. She hatched nine chicks at the zoo, which has the largest colony of African penguins in the UK. <i>9 Dec 2015.

- Thousands of well-wishers helped the world’s oldest captive-bred panda celebrate her 38th birthday on 10 August. Jia Jia has outlived the life expectancy of a zoo panda by eight years and has a healthy appetite. She eats 15lb (6.8kg) of bamboo and fruit a day in her enclosure at Ocean Park, Hong Kong. She has joint problems, high blood pressure and poor vision from cataracts. *Metro*, 11 Aug 2016.

- Poncho, believed to be the world’s oldest parrot, turned 90 last October. The green-winged macaw, who starred in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* with Jim Carrey in 1994, celebrated with a walnut-stuffed cake. After she filmed *102 Dalmatians* with Glenn Close in the UK in 2000, she was deemed too frail to fly back to the US, so she was passed to Rebecca Taylor, a pet shop owner in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, where she remains to this day – as far as we know. *D.Mail*, 5 Nov 2012, 14 Oct 2015; Sun, 14 Oct 2015.



NECROLOG

This month, the Christian fundamentalist who mainstreamed the apocalypse is summoned to heaven, while a pioneering investigator of the cattle mutilation phenomenon passes on



TIM LAHAYE

The Reverend Tim LaHaye, son of a Ford auto worker from Detroit, was one of the most influential Christian fundamentalists in America, credited with moving religious fanaticism based on belief in an imminent apocalypse into the American cultural mainstream. In 1984 he founded the American Coalition for Traditional Values, which – with his wife Beverly's counter-feminist Concerned Women for America – became two of the most influential lobby groups in the US. In 2003 the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals described LaHaye as the most influential Christian leader – ahead of Billy Graham – in the US in the previous 25 years.

He designed a self-improvement scheme called the LaHaye Temperament Analysis (based on the mediæval theory of the four humours). He wrote dozens of books – including self-help manuals like *How to Win over Depression* (1974), *Anger Is a Choice* (1982), *Why You Act the Way You Do* (1984), *I Love You, But Why Are We So Different?* (1991) and the best-selling *The Act of Marriage* (1976) in which he claimed that religious wives have sex more often and enjoy it more than non-believers.

An unorthodox but powerful element in LaHaye's ministry was fiction. His *Left Behind* series of 12 novels (co-written with Jerry B Jenkins) became the publishing phenomenon of the turn of the 21st century, selling more than

58 million copies, with four of them topping the *New York Times* bestseller list. The books became a fixture at every chain store and airport bookrack in the country. The ninth book, entitled *Desecration: Antichrist Takes the Throne*, was published a month after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. LaHaye and Jenkins became millionaires many times over, but unlike some others in the fundamentalist movement, LaHaye was not motivated by money.

On the surface, LaHaye's books were old-fashioned adventure stories, but their core was theological, inspired by pre-millennialism: the Second Coming is imminent and that before it comes, Christ will summon all “true believers” who will be lifted up to Heaven in the Rapture (an idea popularised in the 1830s by John Nelson Derby, founder of the Exclusive Brethren). The first novel in the series – *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (1995) – opens with passengers vanishing from on board a transatlantic Boeing 747 leaving nothing but piles of clothes, jewellery and dental fillings.

LaHaye described the book as “the first fictional portrayal of events that is true to the literal interpretation of Bible prophecy.” However, it is not the first Rapture novel – or even the first Rapture book to bear the title *Left Behind*. Another was published by Peter and Patti Lalonde just before the release of LaHaye's. Further, there are startling parallels between *Left Behind* and a 1970 novel entitled *666* by Salem Kirban. As Carl Olson remarked in *This Rock* magazine: “LaHaye has been in the Bible prophecy business for over thirty years. I find it difficult to believe he had no knowledge of the books by Kirban and the Lalondes. While recycling might be good for the environment, it isn't very appealing when it comes to literature.” [See **FT215:59**.]

Left behind will be the unbelievers – not just atheists, but also Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and everyone else, who will then endure seven years of

catastrophes (the Tribulation) presided over by the Antichrist. At the end of this, Christ (an English speaker, naturally) will reappear in the Second Coming after which Armageddon, the final battle between good and evil, will take place. Finally the triumphant Christ will rule in peace for 1,000 years (the Millennium) before the world comes to an end. Most of the *Left Behind* series concerns the adventures of a group who become born again Christians after the Rapture and who spend seven years racing round the world in fast cars and helicopters fighting the evil forces of the Antichrist – a Romanian-born Secretary General of the UN whose troops are called “peacekeepers” and who is based in Baghdad.

Opinion polls carried out in 2002 suggested that a large percentage of Americans regarded the novels less as pulp fiction than tomorrow's news reports. They found, for example, that nearly a quarter believed that the Bible had predicted the 9-11 attacks; about the same number believed that Jesus would return in their lifetimes, and nearly two in three (including, or so it was said, President George W Bush) believed the Book of Revelation's apocalyptic prophecies to be broadly accurate.

LaHaye was an enthusiastic conspiracy buff, convinced that the Illuminati was just one of many groups working to “turn America into an amoral, humanist country, ripe for merger into a one-world socialist state”. In *Rapture Under Attack* he wrote: “I myself have been a forty-five year student of the satanically-inspired, centuries-old conspiracy to use government, education, and media to destroy every vestige of Christianity within our society and establish a new world order. Having read at least fifty books on the Illuminati, I am convinced that it exists and can be blamed for many of man's inhumane actions against his fellow man during the past two hundred years.”

The *Left Behind* novels spawned a 2014 film adaptation starring Nicolas Cage as well as a full-

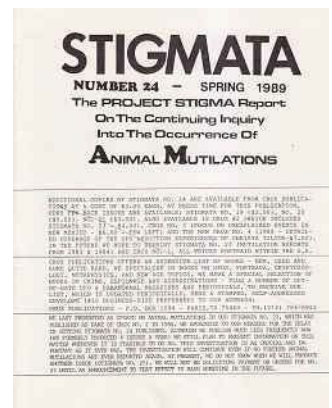
blown merchandise industry with CDs, DVDs, calendars allowing the chosen to count the days until Rapture, clothes sporting a Rapture logo, a board game in which players earn “redemption tokens” that can be cashed in for eternal life, even a book for those who miss the great event, called *Oops, I Guess I Wasn't Ready* (what to do if you miss the Rapture).

LaHaye was anti-evolution, anti-abortion, anti-Catholic, anti-gun laws, anti-pacifism, anti-UN (the notion of global peace he regarded as a con-trick perpetrated by the Antichrist to postpone the apocalypse), anti-environmentalist, anti-Harry Potter, anti-feminist and virulently anti-gay. He believed that a precondition of the Second Coming was that the state of Israel should be re-established within its biblical borders, and that the Battle of Armageddon would be brought about by hostile forces, based in Iraq, mounting a massive attack on Israel.

The Reverend Tim LaHaye, Christian fundamentalist, born Detroit, Michigan 27 April 1926; died San Diego, California 25 July 2016, aged 90.

TOM ADAMS

Travelling west from Texas in 1970, Tom Adams and Gary Massey drove to Colorado to research the 1967 “Snippy the Horse” mutilation case [FT68:23]. Adams subsequently became known for investigating cattle mutilations. Starting in 1978, he published the newsletter *Stigmata* to track cattle

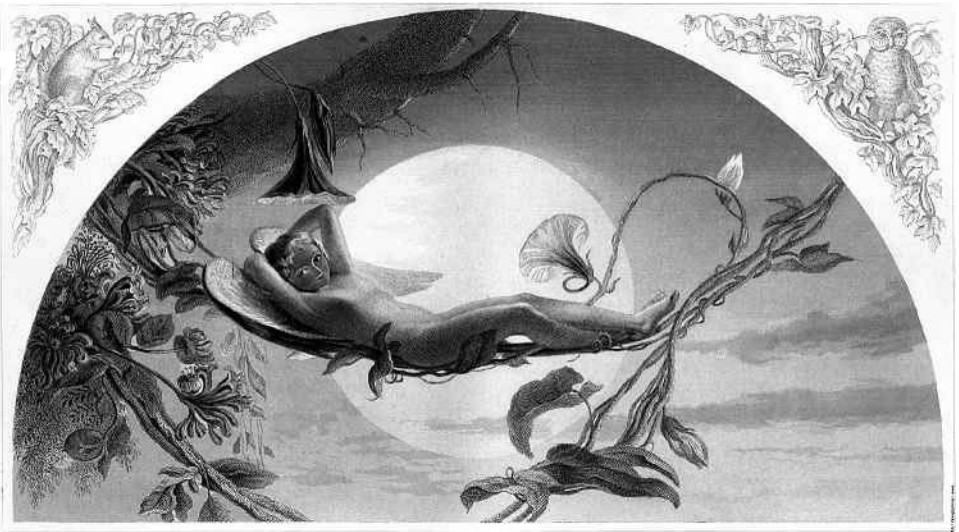


and animal mutilations as well as the associated black (mystery) helicopters. The most prominent theories concerning the source of cattle and animal mutilations were satanic cults, extraterrestrials, and black or covert government programmes. The latter theory is dubious since livestock could easily have been culled from government-owned herds away from prying eyes. Speculation in *Stigmata* was kept to a minimum. Adams gathered mutilation news with the motto "Consider everything. Believe nothing". He possessed a photographic memory and encyclopædic knowledge in many fields including modern music. He enjoyed working behind the scenes, helping other researchers. He began work on *Mute Testimony* in 2000, combining his research work with that of his associate David Perkins. Early in 2002, he gave Perkins permission to use his writings and materials in any way he wished and ceased all communication with him thereafter.

Adams dropped out of paranormal research for unknown, possibly personal, reasons. Perhaps he was tired of dealing with associates of the fundamentalist born-again persuasion. His short marriage to Christa Tilton, 1987-1991, may have triggered a retreat from pursuing paranormal interests, although he apparently continued research on a high level throughout the 1990s. His friend Gary Massey alleges that when suffering a humiliating incident during driving lessons he vowed to never drive, a vow he kept. I corresponded with him in 1990 and 1991 concerning cattle and horse mutilations in Cochise and Santa Cruz County in SE Arizona, and can confirm he did not enter the Internet age. For many years he worked at Flex-O-Lite, and latterly at the Dollar Store, but was in dire financial straits for several years before his death. More than seven months elapsed before the research community knew of his passing.

Adams privately published his review of mystery helicopters and animal mutilations, *The Choppers – and the Choppers* (1991), which is available on-line at: http://www.ignaciodarnaude.com/avistamientos_ovnis/Adams,Thomas,Choppers%20and%20the%20Choppers-1.pdf
Thomas R Adams, cattle mutilations investigation pioneer, born Paris, Texas 6 May 1945; died Paris, Texas 20 Aug 2014, aged 69.

Terry W Colvin



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

THE FIGURES ON SOUTHER FELL

Souther Fell is an impressive north Cumbrian peak, with steep and sometimes scree-laden slopes. In 1735, in 1737 and in 1744, spectral figures were seen on these slopes from the farmhouses on the flats below. Apparently, a single man saw the 1735 manifestation; a family the second; and 26 people the third. That's very important.

The figures were not in the sky above Souther Fell, but moved on the mountain itself, so much so that it was possible to draw the path they followed. The favourite 18th-century explanation, namely that this was a *fata morgana*, or complex mirage, is an absolute non-starter; then, though another explanation, that of three low-flying meteorites, is perhaps even less convincing. Most of the figures seem to have been military. There were formations of cavalry, there were carriages with soldiers, but there was also a man with dogs chasing horses.

Is it possible that these were real people? There are several considerations that suggest not. (1) Some of the figures went abnormally fast; (2) the horses and men seemed to have had a single body; (3) the figures went over impossible terrain, including rock faces; (4) the numbers, particularly in the third case, were astounding – horses paraded across the mount for an hour; and (5) the figures left behind no physical marks, such as hoofprints or thrown horseshoes.

Usually, faced with this kind of evidence, I'd

assume that we were dealing with a late source and that the story had improved in the telling. But the first detailed analysis was published in 1747, just three years after the last sighting, by an author who'd investigated carefully. The best report was published, meanwhile, after another writer had talked to various witnesses, in 1787; and some surviving witnesses had given sworn statements in 1785. In fact, the only important discrepancies in early sources are the years: for example, the 1747 account (in the *Gentleman's Magazine*) claims, wrongly, that the last sighting

was in 1745. The Souther Fell spectres badly need a long study: there will be unexploited contemporary reports in, as yet, undigitised Cumbrian newspapers; not to mention in the myriad of books written on the Lake District from 1750-1900.

However, let me try immediately to introduce one other datum that is frequently

overlooked or downplayed. Every one of the three sightings took place on 23 June: Midsummer Night's Eve, the night when the fairies come out to play. In the drab 18th-century accounts of the sightings there was no room for the word 'fairy'. But in understanding what happened, we need to recall that fairies were often seen as phantom armies; a mysterious militia seen in Lancashire in 1745 was believed, for example, by locals to be fairies anticipating the Jacobite revolt. And fairylore was strong in Cumberland into the early 19th century.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

MOST OF THE
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FLYING SORCERY

PETER BROOKESMITH PRESENTS HIS REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

PUT IT IN THE BLACK BAG, PLEASE

Just to underline, not to say hammer home, my theme that ufology is mired in ancient cases, moribund thinking, and the recycling of rubbish, one's attention has lately been called to some recent effusions of Linda Moulton Howe, a media entrepreneur and former beauty queen, who has a taste for what most of us would call tall stories.

Those with long memories will recall that not long before the Roswell 50th-anniversary schmooze-fest of 1997, word surfaced on Art Bell's *Coast to Coast* radio show that someone had found a chunk of metal in New Mexico, and it was so strange and inexplicable that, naturally, it *had* to be a fragment of a certain well-publicised flying saucer. It might have been more interesting if somebody had claimed it was proof that the Mescalero Apache had once been accomplished alchemists, but there is a limit (never far off) in ufology to which one may jump to conclusions. Anyway, Ms Howe was put in charge of researching this curiously layered piece of metal, and conscientiously sent it off to two qualified scientists to have it analysed. As far as I know, by the way, the finder remains anonymous, and it remains uncertain if the fragment actually was found at White Sands. The story is that it was removed from a "wedge-shaped aerial vehicle of unknown origin" at White Sands, New Mexico, in 1947. Not that it really matters: but, had this been allegedly a long-lost Rembrandt, calls for a less skimpy provenance would have been long and loud. However, we are where we are.

The investigators duly reported back that there was nothing unearthly about the fragment, which consisted of thin alternate layers of magnesium (100–200 microns) and bismuth (1–4 microns), with traces of zinc in the former. Someone had suggested it was a high-temperature superconductor. It failed those tests. Someone else had proposed that it might be part of a propulsion system, and had imaginatively theorised that applying extremely

Someone had found a strange chunk of metal in New Mexico

high DC potentials would make it lose weight. No luck there, either, which should hardly come as a surprise. (See www.ufowatchdog.com/howeufodebris.htm for the full report by one of Ms Howe's appointed investigators, scientific technologist Nicholas A Reiter.) So there seemed to be nothing anomalous about this many-layered sandwich of bismuth and magnesium. The only thing Reiter could not establish in 1996 was how it had come to be the way it was, and to what Earthly use it might have been put.

In 2001, Reiter updated his report: "In 2000, one last revelation came our way on the origin of the artifact. The combination of bismuth and magnesium had eluded us for four years. But then one day, we found a reference to an obscure industrial process used in the refinement of lead. The process, called the Betterton-Krohl Process, uses molten magnesium floated over the surface of liquid lead. The magnesium sucks up, or pulls bismuth impurities out of the lead! Often, the magnesium is used over and over again... Could this little known process have been the real origin of some unusual-looking metal residue, that was then in turn promoted as a piece of alien technology?"

Job done, then, you'd think. But not for Linda Moulton Howe, who rejected Reiter's findings and those of her other investigator, who'd also failed to endorse the ET interpretation. Five years later, Ms Howe was telling the 'X-Conference' in Washington DC, in best conspiracy-cover-up style, "what it is like to investigate

BELOW: Linda Moulton Howe clutching a mysterious ET artefact... oh, it's just her Regional Emmy award for her 1980 documentary *Strange Harvest*.

hard evidence when your own government says there is nothing there, universities are scared to use their resources, foundations will not provide funding and peer review science is closed off", and handing round a sample of what she called "the unidentified layered metal" for her audience to "see and touch". Fifteen years after Reiter had solved Ms Howe's problem for her, she is still touting this object as an ET artefact. On 4 August she posted this on her website (www.earthfiles.com/index.php?category=Headline+News): "Was Bismuth/ Magnesium Layered Metal in NM UFO Crash A Superconductor?", quoting an unnamed Army sergeant "writing from "his Grandad's diary about 1947 security patrol at UFO crash in Roswell region" [sic] that "A lone surviving occupant was found within the Disc, and it was apparent its left leg was broken... The occupant communicated via telepathic means." Ms Howe will surely give recycling a bad name.

GET WELL SOON

I learned most of the above from posts and links on Errol Bruce Knapp's 'UFO UpDates' Facebook page. I am more than grateful to Errol for his help and hospitality while I was researching my book about abductions, and for many years of friendship. The original UFO UpDates email list was, in its heyday, full of interesting characters with interesting things to say, pro- and con- the phenomenon. The latest news about Errol, though, is not so good. It seems that sometime in the summer he had a heart attack *and* a stroke. It seems that subsequent surgery to install a pacemaker also installed a severe infection. At last report, he had cognitive problems and could not speak, although he did recognise his visitors. He is partly paralysed, and his hands jerk involuntarily. But he is expected to recover, although it will be long process. I'm sure I'm not alone in wishing Errol the very best, and a faster recovery than prognosticated.



LINDA MOULTON HOWE

SPACE ODDITIES

For as long as human beings have flown into space there have been stories that odd things have happened to astronauts out there.

From claims that the Apollo landings on the Moon found structures hiding inside craters to space shuttles being followed by aliens, these yarns are often on the dubious side. Now NASA has released transcripts covering incidents reputed to have occurred during the late 1960s/early 1970s when Apollo headed for the Moon. These have been placed on their website www.nasa.gov/ and illuminate some controversies.

Take Apollo 8 – the pioneer mission to fly around the Moon without attempting to land. This was the first time that humans travelled far enough to see Earth as a whole planet against the black of space. That historic sight was beamed live to us all, rising behind another world (our Moon), and I was one of millions to put it onto my bedroom wall soon afterwards. For the first time the human race could see how small, isolated and vulnerable we were on this drifting ball of rock. That single image inspired many towards ecological crusades and to rethink our place in the cosmos and whether we were alone.

Partly through need and partly by clever planning, NASA had set this moment for Christmas Eve 1968 and for the three astronauts to broadcast a Christmas message from our sister world. On the 40th anniversary in 2008 commander Jim Lovell explained that they were given no instructions on what to say – just that it should be ‘appropriate’ – and so they chose to read from Genesis, with all three astronauts taking turns talking to the largest audience ever on planet Earth. After circling the Moon 10 times early on that Christmas morning, the crew then had to ‘burn’ the engines to propel them out of orbit and head for home. If this went wrong then they would be stranded days from home with no hope of rescue as their air ran out. When they came back from the dark side into radio contact, Commander Lovell announced the burn’s success with: “Please be informed, there is a Santa Claus”. To which mission control replied wryly – “That’s affirmative, you are the best ones to know”.

This was claimed by some to be a ‘code word’ to mean that on the dark side they found proof of aliens. I would have thought – and Lovell confirmed in 2008 – it was just an appropriate way of saying they had all got the one present they wanted that Christmas and would be coming home to their families. Again and again in mission transcripts you will find hopeful believers leaping to conclusions, making innocuous words mean something they were never intended to convey.

Elsewhere in the Apollo 8 mission they circled the Moon. During one of the live TV broadcasts astronaut William Anders notes the crew see “a strange light down there”. Borman quips: “Is it a bonfire?” To which Anders responds: “It might be campfires”. Again, most people would accept that this was simply space humour. In a tense situation these transcripts are quite full of such asides



as an effective stress-reducing device. What it obviously was not was anything really burning – as there is no oxygen on the sterile Moon.

At the time nobody knew what the light was, but astronomers have seen them from Earth and called them Transient Lunar Phenomena (TLP). No scientist thinks they are alien spaceships. Outgassing from craters is one theory – although there are several others, including small meteorite impacts – because, given its lack of protective atmosphere, the Moon is bombarded constantly by such debris. In fact, Apollo 11 was later vectored to look at TLPs viewed from Earth by astronomers when flying over the crater Aristarchus. Michael Collins, who stayed in orbit whilst Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin stepped onto the surface, was able to see them and make scientific observations at close quarters; but he did not joke about what they looked like, so nobody has misread that transcript as anything extraterrestrial.

One of the most provocative transcripts occurred during the Apollo 10 mission, which was the last flight designed to go to the Moon and test the lunar module close to the surface but then come home without making the final dangerous stage. The mission was in May 1969 just weeks before Apollo 11 took the final step and successfully landed. At one point, as Apollo 10 rounded the Moon, Eugene Cernan heard a “whistling sound” and remarked that it “even sounds outer-spacey” and was like music. Commander Thomas Stafford agreed he could hear it and Cernan added “like something from outer space – who is going to believe it?” The third crew member, John Young, replied: “Nobody... Should we tell them about it?” Cernan agreed with this assessment, noting: “We ought to think about it some” – thus triggering speculation of an extraterrestrial cover-up.

In the end, the commander, Tom Stafford, contacted Houston to try to relay the sounds and the matter fizzled out unresolved. There have been numerous suggestions about what the crew were listening to. Some scientists suggested that it was noise picked up from one of the gas giant planets like Jupiter – known to emit huge amounts of noisy radiation that would have been easier to detect with the bulk of the Moon shielding the swamping noise from Earth. Another theory was the spacemen’s minds were creating a musical pattern out of random noise by matching it to rhythms stored in their memory.

Interestingly, I had a possibly relevant experience just before Apollo 10 that might be instructive. My family had a large old-

fashioned radiogram that tuned across a vast range of frequencies. By chance we lived very close to the first BBC studios in a converted church in Manchester where a new TV show – *Top of the Pops* – began transmission. I happened to deliver newspapers from the shop directly opposite and saw many bands arriving. I also discovered here that you could ‘tune in’ to the rehearsals live if you found the ‘secret’ frequency and were nearby. Until the show moved into a new studio this was great fun. In attempting to look for other ‘secret’ broadcasts late one night we came upon a very startling message. It was in broken English and faded in and out in an eerie manner rather like the astronauts described – but you could pick out a few words including “This is a test transmission” followed by odd words such as “etheric” and ending with “this station is situated in outer space”.

In January 1964 spaceflight was very new, but I thought this was a new Earth satellite – or even to my childish ears that it sounded like a far more exciting alien message beamed to Earth hoping to attract the attention of the latest world to reach up into the cosmos. Of course, it was no such thing. Years later when working at the BBC I found out that others had heard it too, and some were better equipped to track it to source. Some even claimed to hear “an alien language” spoken alongside the constantly rebroadcast message. In fact it made the local TV in Manchester in 1964 and Jodrell Bank staff were played a recording of the message made by a radio ham but not detected on their big dish. They suspected it was a hoax by someone trying to trick people into thinking aliens were out there and told the BBC to report it to the proper authorities.

But it was not a hoax either. In fact, the eerie broadcasts were not coming from Earth orbit and never used the words “outer space” as I (and many others hearing them – or the recording made of them) swore they did. The true words spoken were badly modulated and hard to pick out but a Scottish radio expert used a beat frequency oscillator to clean them up and revealed that, instead of what everyone thought, the actual words spoken were: “This is a test transmission for circuit adjustment purposes from a radio station of the Hellenic telecommunications organisation. This station is situated in Athens, Greece.” Our minds had been startled by the oddity and rushed to identify what we were listening to, so found a form that matched the context we were placing onto the message and an Earth-bound long distance radio transmission from southern Europe was ‘heard’ yet ‘believed’ by us to be an alien message beamed to our world from inhabitants of another. Was this the same process that caused the Apollo astronauts to hear strange modulated sounds of natural origin crossing millions of miles of space and then ‘decode’ them via the expectation of their minds as ‘space music’ formed by joining the audio dots?

As you can see, not all strange things seen or heard in space have a mysterious explanation; a few instances are a little harder to resolve, and I will look at those next month.

FROM OUTER SPACE TO YOU

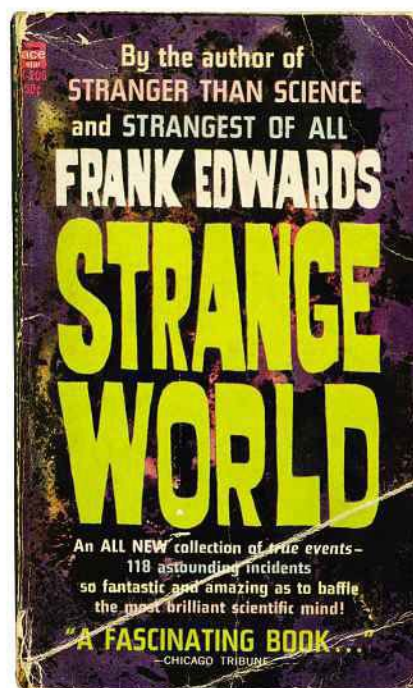
JACK WOMACK has been assembling his collection of UFO-related books for half a century, gradually building up a visual and cultural history of the saucer age. Fellow writer and fortean **WILLIAM GIBSON** joined him to celebrate a shared obsession with pulp ufology, printed forteana and the search for an all too human truth...

ALL IMAGES FROM **FLYING SAUCERS ARE REAL!** PUBLISHED BY ANTHOLOGY EDITIONS.

As well as being an award-winning writer of speculative fiction, Jack Womack has been for 50 years a collector of printed material – books, magazines and eccentric pamphlets – relating to the UFO phenomenon. The physical collection has now found a safe home at the archives of Georgetown University, as the ‘Jack Womack Flying Saucer Library’, but Jack is also sharing some of these pop-ufological treasures in the form of a book called *Flying Saucers Are Real!* Given the title, the fact that this is a book about books – not nuts-and-bolts UFOs, whatever they are – might come as a surprise to some. It’s a visual history of the late 20th century’s obsession with other worlds and alien visitors, and mostly of what Jung called “a modern myth of things seen in the sky”. Or, as cyberpunk pioneer and fellow fortean William Gibson has it in his introduction: “It’s the source-code, the veritable root of the enigma... the only physical evidence of the advent of that meme... The truth, all these years, hasn’t, as *The X-Files* had it, been out there, but rather was in here. Within these peculiar volumes, these testimonials to certain human needs.”

WILLIAM GIBSON: I walked into Puckett’s Greyhound Cafeteria, on Main Street in Wytheville, Virginia, and saw this odd-looking type-only cover on the paperback rack: *Book of the Damned*. It was an Ace book, an imprint I held in some regard. I’m not sure of the year, or how old I was, but I paid whatever fraction of a dollar and took it home. Ace subsequently reprinted the other three volumes as well, bless their hearts.

I bought that book when Virginia was an apartheid state, non-white Americans legally forbidden to use the same toilets and water



“FORT’S *LO!* TERRIFIED ME. I HID IT IN MY CLOSET FOR SIX MONTHS”

LEFT: Frank Edwards, *Strange World* (New York, Ace Books, 1964). FACING PAGE: A photograph of a UFO over San Francisco, in *Flying Saucer Review's World Roundup of UFO News and Events* (New York, Citadel Press, 1958).

fountains as I did, in Puckett’s or elsewhere. That paperback, in retrospect, proved as delightfully subversive a text as any I’ve read. You’ve told me about your own first time, but it’s been a while.

JACK WOMACK: Local TV naturally led to the world of non-traditional literature. I was eight when I listened to two morning show hosts discuss Frank Edwards’s *Strange World* and within an hour I was at the nearest Rexall Drugstore, in Lexington, Kentucky, pulling it out of its slot in the black metal rack. They saw a lot more of me as the months passed, and I started to find other such collections – *Strangest of All*, *Stranger Than Strange*, *Son of Stranger Than Strange* – and got every one I saw. Also haunted the single used bookstore downtown, which was a good one.

In all of them I found hints of that sense of wonder that my friends who read science fiction from a young age describe finding. Mine, however, came from thinking about the implications or possibilities of the Barbados Coffins or the Mantell UFO sighting, or any of the old classics.

Sometime in 1965 I found, on the rack, the second Ace paperback Fort, *Lo!* The blurbs on the back – “THE COW WHO GAVE BIRTH TO TWO LAMBS” – were different, somehow, to those on the other books. “To read Charles Fort is to ride on a comet.”

Unlike the other books, *Lo!* terrified me. I hid it in my closet for six months, afraid of reading past the second chapter (even though





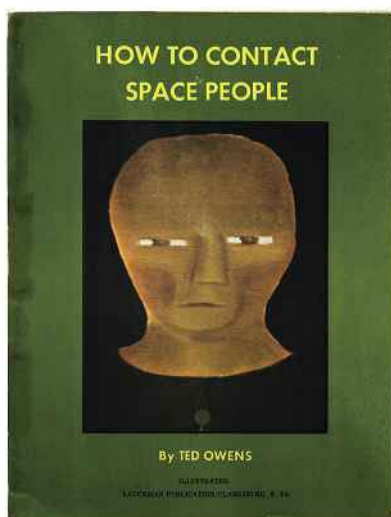
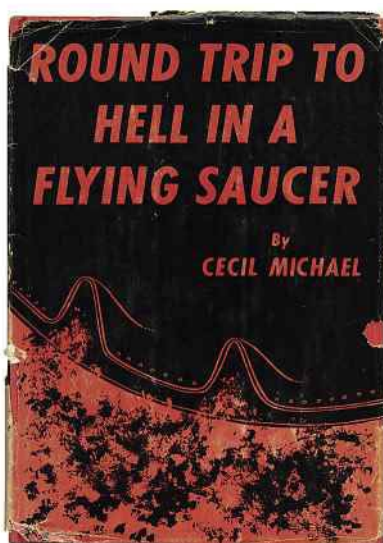
LEFT: A pair of aluminium foil Martians in Morris Goran, *The Modern Myth: Ancient Astronauts and UFOs* (AS Barnes and Company/Thomas Yoseloff Ltd, 1978). **ABOVE RIGHT:** A painting by David Huggins based on a close encounter at his Georgia farm in the 1950s. "These Little Guys seemed to come out of the sky. They seemed to be able to appear and disappear." Linda Moulton Howe, *Glimpses of Other Realities, Volume I: Facts and Eyewitnesses* (LMH Productions, 1993). **BELOW:** Cecil Michael, *Round Trip to Hell in a Flying Saucer* (Vantage Press, 1955). Ted Owens, *How to Contact Space People* (Saucerian Publications, 1969).

I realise, now, I was a forteen by the time I finished the first chapter). The implications and incidents described, and the way Fort described them, was unlike anything else I'd encountered. It was like going from the red dirt marijuana of *Strangest of All* to the CIA-approved LSD tested at Narco, outside of town, of *Lo!* I never came back.

WG: I had grown up with my mother's account of a close sighting in 1948, near Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the year I was born. Classic cigar-shaped craft, illuminated windows or panels along its sides, described as resembling the windows of another passenger train when yours passes it in the night. It had sped, stopped dead, levitated to clear a ridge on our rented farm, then sped on, all in complete silence. She was the only witness, of course. Possibly a dream, confused with reality, or a waking one? I do believe she believed it had happened. So I had that to reflect on, when I first found Fort. Did you have any tales of the anomalous, in your family?

JW: A couple. My great-grandmother and her two girls lived in a cemetery keeper's house in the middle of an old downtown cemetery in Lexington for a few months in 1906. One night my great-grandfather was patrolling his beat, and in his absence she said unseen figures started pounding on the doors and she was ready to get out the double-barrel but didn't, when the banging suddenly stopped. They moved, not long after that. Southern cemetery weirdness, I always figured.

In the late 1950s, my uncle used to tell my mother and grandparents about seeing flying saucers over the Kentucky River, where he lived in a small cabin. As he was, at that time, recovering from a near-fatal attack of the



DTs a few years earlier, no one ever took him seriously.

In 1966, on a summer night when I was 10, in the heart of the second great UFO flap, my mother and I were sitting in lawn chairs and watched a slow-moving object with revolving orange lights pass overhead, seemingly silent. We watched for maybe six minutes or so. Mother called the authorities but nobody else had heard or seen anything. About a month later, my grandmother and I were in the University of Kentucky football stadium to see Fourth of July fireworks when the exact same thing flew overhead, but now visible from a different angle, so it was easy to tell it was a plane with orange advertising. My mother still didn't believe it to be the same thing. Nonetheless, that was when I got my first lesson in the validity of eyewitness testimony.

WG: I've seen several UFOs, all de-Identifying pretty quickly. One was a small plane with the undersides of its wings rigged with illuminated panels, identified as such in the local paper, the morning after. My favourite wasn't actually flying, when sighted, but rather on the ground in a field, so that for about three seconds I utterly knew that They had not only landed, but in a stunningly classic 1950s saucer! It was revealed to me as the car swung around a turn on Vancouver Island, then instantly resolved into what it actually was: a pair of Volks beetles, parked with noses facing one another, which happened to both be the exact same shade of pale metallic blue. Another was actually the reverse of a sighting: an identified object growing gradually more mysterious-looking: seated on the beach at Spanish Banks, at sunset, a

seagull flew out to sea from behind me. As I watched it dwindle, I saw it become a weird, seemingly oscillating, steadily-pulsing point of brilliant white light, actually reflected sunlight on the bird's wings, an effect I've read of in the literature. Had I not observed it seemingly become that, I could never have been convinced that that point of light was a seagull.

What Fort did for me was make me more scientific, I think. That is, I became agnostic about everything, which I see as more in keeping with a system consisting of an evolving body of theory. Not that I don't believe, for instance, that homeopathy is utterly ridiculous. How did your reading of Fort affect you, philosophically?

JW: Like you, I started to approach everything in as logical a way as I could; and after time came to see that it wasn't so much that even if flying saucers, or Bigfoot, or the Loch Ness Monster didn't exist, the fact that so many believed they did almost made them real, at least for a time. But, that nothing could be automatically assumed. First, you had to look at the data, as the data are.

As I continued to collect books on these subjects, now no longer so much willing to believe as just wanting to see how many different theories and notions could be put forth before a believing public without evidence, and in what sort of way. By the late 1960s the old *Strange* collections had been pretty much replaced by books on UFOs both new and old, and I got those; and at the used



"AT THE CORE OF IT ALL, THE FLYING SAUCER COLLECTION WAS GROWING"

bookstores, I'd turn up the occasional old hardcover here and there for a quarter or so.

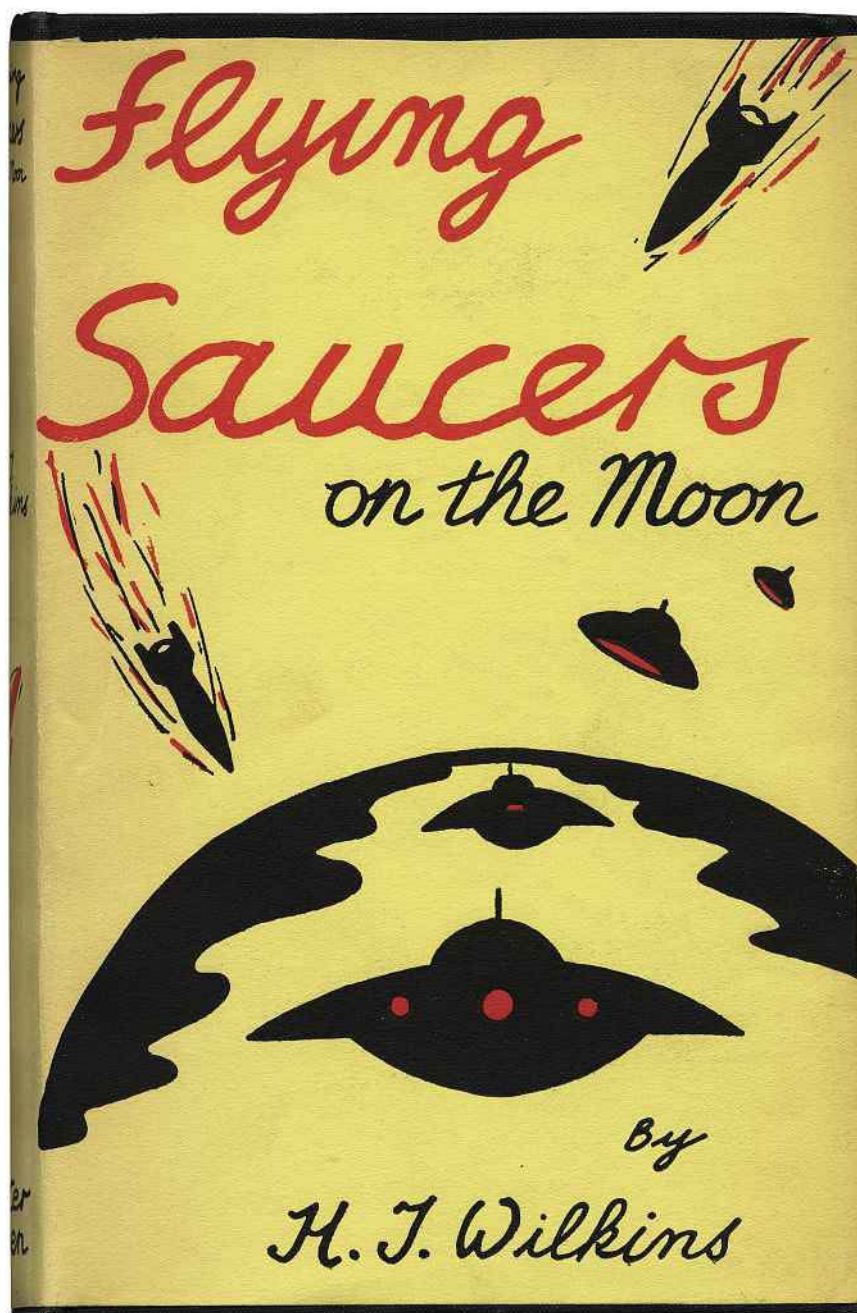
It wasn't until 20 years or so had passed that I realised how many books there had been, and how many I wound up having in front of me, all of which were ultimately most interesting for what they said about the authors, and the beliefs and hopes and fears of their authors.

WG: I remember visiting your apartment for the first time, and being impressed both by your library and by your sense of what these books meant. It was very eclectic, of course, and I recall being particularly impressed by a mimeographed volume, bound in black electrical tape, declaring Dan Rather, of all people, to have been JFK's assassin, and also by an extraordinarily elegant, privately published, profusely illustrated coffee table book of someone's enema bag collection. Until then I had never thought to suspect Rather, nor had I known that enema bags, in themselves, could be regarded as erotic objects. Needless to say, I was delighted. But meanwhile, I suppose, at the core of it all, the flying saucer collection was steadily growing.

JW: After the Condon Report came out in 1969, essentially saying that there was no reason for further scientific investigation of UFOs, and at the same time we went to the Moon, the first thing that happened was that these sorts of books disappeared, briefly. Meanwhile, the essential demographic began to split. You had books on connections



TOP: Howard Menger, *From Outer Space to You* (Saucerian Books, 1959). Menger was a contactee who met his first alien – a blonde woman sitting on a rock – in 1932, aged 10, and was later taken to the Moon, where he was allowed to hold a space potato. **ABOVE:** This Venusian allowed Menger to photograph him in front of his ship.



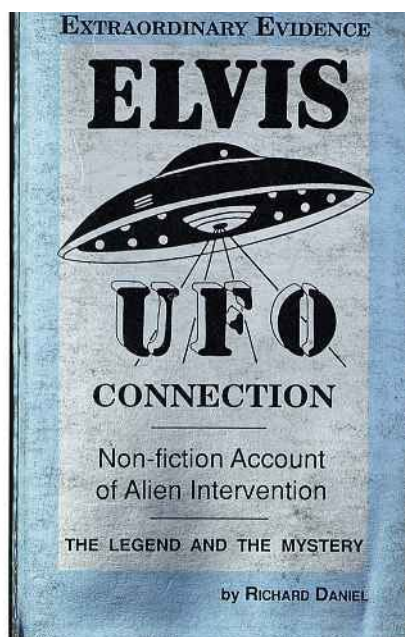
LEFT: Harold T Wilkins, *Flying Saucers on the Moon* (Peter Owen Ltd, 1954). Long interested in forteana, Wilkins turned to UFOs late in life and continued to demonstrate "a breathtaking willingness to believe anything". Describing himself as "an open-minded skeptic" he proceeds to tell of an alien spotted in a small Kentucky restaurant, recognisable as such by his "five-toed shoes". **BOTTOM LEFT:** Michael X's *We Want You: Is Hitler Alive?* (Saucerian books, 1969, originally published 1960) was one of the first books to propose a South American/Nazi origin for the saucers, and as well suggest Hitler survived in one of the secret Argentine saucer bases. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Richard Daniel, *The Elvis-UFO Connection* (Castle Rock Enterprises, 1987). The book proposes that Elvis's career was helped by alien beings.

between Bigfoot and UFOs, between mystery cats in Devon and UFOs; you had books on whether aliens were from here, or Earth-2, or somewhere else; you had books proposing the Moon was a big spaceship, that the Moon was hollow, that alien bases were on the Moon, and my old favourite, *We Never Went To The Moon!*

Early on I widened the collection into pretty much all fortean categories, and then further into the collection I came to call "Human – All Too Human." I would pick up UFO and forteana books I didn't have wherever I found them. Atlantis and Watkins and Skoob always good for those in London; one of my biggest scores came during my first visit to Powell's in Portland, in 1994. Book barns in Maine. Old houses serving as bookstores, in Indiana. Stores in the hearts of barely-living downtowns. Then, during the first year of Internet sales I found 90 per cent of the remaining titles on that list for which I'd been searching. The flying saucer section in my collection was certainly the most fully representative of manifestations of that particular phenomenon, presenting all theories from abstruse quantum possibilities to the likelihood that the Saucer people were possibly minions of Satan.

WG: I remember you having a file card in your wallet, or half of one, later in the game, that listed the legendary rarities, the unobtainia. Particularly one that chronicled weirdnesses of the Great War, virtually every copy having been incinerated en masse by the Luftwaffe, in London. Did you ever find that one? And I remember you finding an Ogo-pogo volume on that card, in a nearby bookstore, on a visit to Vancouver. And of course I still treasure the hardcover second edition of *Lo!* You gave me 18 years ago, not least because it was illustrated by a young Alexander King, who, as a frequent guest on *The Gary Moore Show*, which my mother watched, was no doubt my very first experience of a bohemian raconteur.

When we met, of course, we also had *Fortean Times* in common, as much we had Fort. I don't remember quite when I discovered *FT*, but it was fairly early on in my life in Vancouver, and I've yet to miss an issue, purchasing each one from a newsstand, usually one or another somewhat specialist newsstand, one after another falling by the wayside as things digitised. Today it's the only magazine I buy unflinchingly, regardless of where I am. And I think it would be fair





ABOVE: Photograph from *A Pictorial Tour of Unarius*, (Unarius Educational Foundation, 1982). The organisation published over 100 books transcribing channelled conversations with the space brothers, and various other-dimensional beings, whose arrival they had awaited since forming in Los Angeles in 1954.

to say that at this point I've probably been influenced as much by the cumulative experience of *FT* as by the works of Fort himself.

JW: I would concur with that. Yes, the aforementioned want list, which by 1998 was down to 300 titles; and a year later, post eBay/Abebooks intros, was down to 10. One was, indeed, *Mysteries of the Great War* by HT Wilkins, one of the most entertaining stylists in the fortean field, which he later entered. *Mysteries* was published by Philip Alan in 1935. I suspect 90 per cent of copies went up with their warehouse and Paternoster Row on the heaviest evening of the Blitz, 29 December 1940. I looked for that one nearly 30 years before finding it, finally, at an Australian Internet store.

Still have that Ogoogo book, still remember that bookshop, whose owner you allowed as had shifty hands sometimes. Am glad your Fort gives you so much pleasure. I gave Richard Kadrey a jacketless first of *Book of The Damned*, which I'm sure he still has. And I have my full set of all five first edition Forts, three (*Book of the Damned*, *Lo! Wild Talents*) in dust jackets, the entire reprinted run of *Doubt!*, all seven *Fortean Studies*, the nine bound *FT*s. Oh yes: *Lo!* is signed. That one being the most influential, ultimately, the one I will likely always keep. Nothing would make me happier than to see Fort's works in the Library of America series.

WG: So my understanding is that the book of the collection, and the associated show currently (August 2016) at Milk Gallery in Manhattan, are the indirect result of

Georgetown University having acquired your saucer collection entire? Recalling the days when virtually every wall in your apartment was covered with collector-crafted board shelving, you must have freed up considerable space in the process! I'd assume that Dan Rather is still in electrician's tape Dallas, the enema bag compendium in its place of honour, the cryptids still gazing down on your now far more conventionally adult domestic arrangements?

JW: Exactly. The show will be held again in the early part of next year at Georgetown University, when the collection arrives in full.

The book of the exhibit, *Flying Saucers Are Real!* has just come out, and it is a fortean marvel of sorts in that I can actually have a part of my library in convenient coffee-table book form.

Much of the rest is still here, including *Is Dan Rather the Kennedy Assassination's San Andreas Fault?* Sadly, *The Erotic Art of the Enema* was mouse-masticated during a minor outbreak, and most of the cryptids have been deaccessioned to other friends.

I am happy to note that *Biblical Dinosaurs*, which posits that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel were in fact saurians, is still in its place on the shelves. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

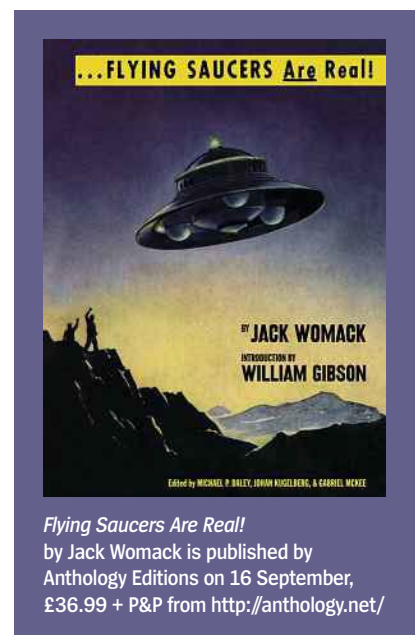


MILK GALLERY/ZLATKO BATISTICH

JACK WOMACK is the author of *Ambient*, *Terraplane*, *Heathern*, *Elvissey*, *Random Acts of Senseless Violence*, *Let's Put the Future Behind Us*, and *Going, Going, Gone*. In 1994, he was the co-winner of the Philip K Dick Award. He was born in Lexington, Kentucky, and is a longtime resident of New York City.



WILLIAM GIBSON is the award-winning author of *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, *Virtual Light*, *Idoru*, *All Tomorrow's Parties*, *Pattern Recognition*, *Spook Country* and *The Peripheral*. He lives in Vancouver, Canada.



MANUSCRIPTS OF MYSTERY

From all the coverage it has received, you might be forgiven for thinking that the Voynich Manuscript is the only mysterious and undeciphered volume in existence. True, it is probably the strangest, with its unique text and hermetic illustrations, but it is certainly not alone.

IAN SIMMONS enters the Library of Babel in search of other unreadable oddities...

The Voynich Manuscript (see **FT130:42-46** and **260:58-59**) takes its name from its discoverer, Polish book dealer Wilfrid Voynich, who bought it in 1912 from the Collegio Romano in Italy (now the Pontifical Gregorian University) when they sold off some of their manuscripts to cover a financial shortfall, and it now resides in Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. A letter tucked into the book traces it back to the library of the noted scholar Athanasius Kircher, and prior to that it was most likely in the possession of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II of Prague, in the mid-17th century; but beyond that its origins remain a mystery. Carbon dating shows that the paper on which it is written dates back to the first half of the 15th century, and analysis shows that the inks used were consistent with that period, so it probably isn't a fake. Since Voynich acquired the manuscript and brought it back to popular awareness, there have been repeated attempts to make sense of the thing. This is an undertaking hindered by the text being in no known alphabet and the illustrations quite unlike anything else scholars have ever seen (though clearly of European origin), but in recent years some headway seems to have been made.



LEFT: Dr John Dee, who owned a copy of the *Book of Soyga*. FACING PAGE: Examining the Voynich Manuscript.

Research published in 2013 analysing the pattern of apparent words within the text claims to show that it follows the rules one would expect were it a real language, suggesting that it is not simply gibberish, or a code, even if the researchers couldn't actually translate a single word.¹ However, Stephen Bax, Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Bedfordshire, claims he has done just this. By identifying constellations and plants in the illustrations and cross-referencing these to the text, he believes he has decoded 10 words made up of 14 of the Voynich symbols and clusters, including words for 'crocus', 'cotton' and 'cumin'.² So, scholarship is gradually beginning to make inroads into the Voynich mystery – but there is still a long way to go before we can read the thing in its entirety.

THE VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT IS IN NO KNOWN ALPHABET

RENAISSANCE RIDDLES

The high profile of the Voynich Manuscript has perhaps served to partially obscure the existence of other peculiar and impenetrable volumes, including one that has, in the past, been confused with the Voynich, *The Book of Soyga* (also known as *Aldaraia*). This is known to have been in the possession of Dr John Dee, Elizabeth I's court magician and astrologer, who



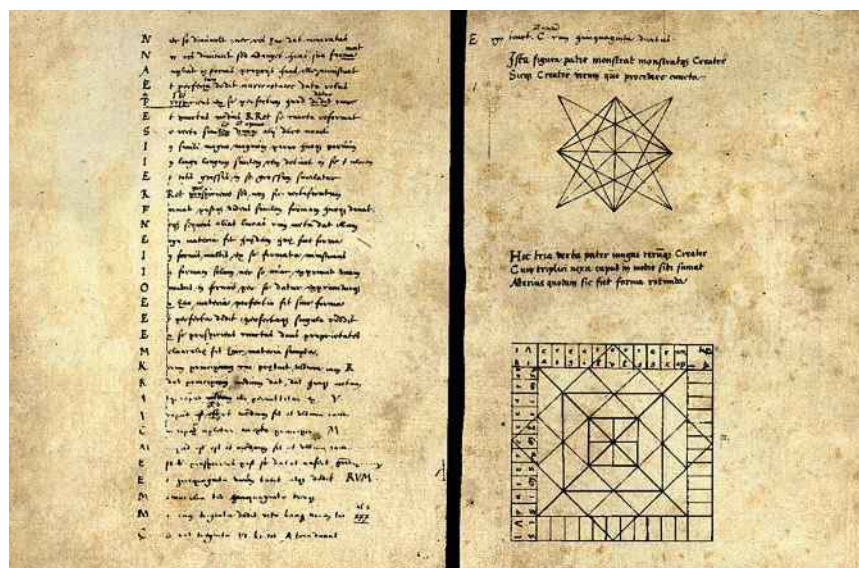
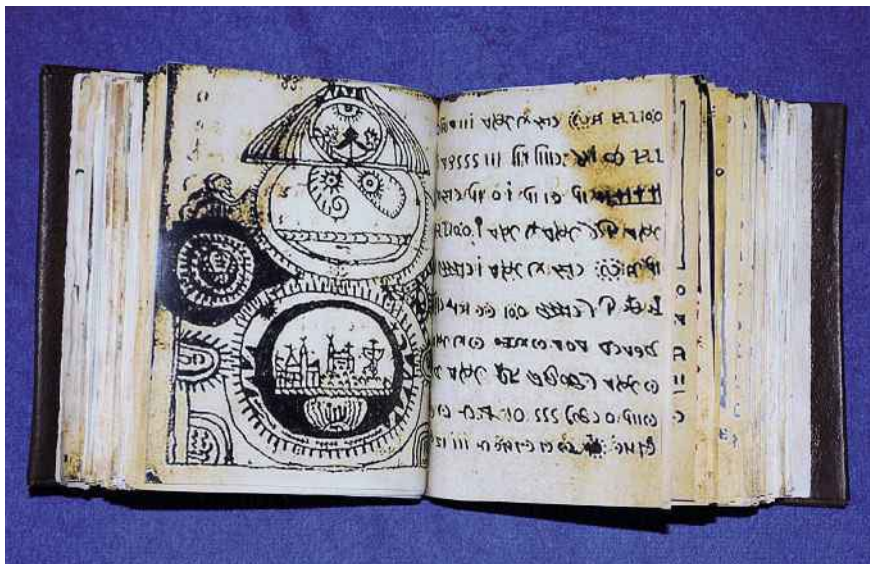
later spent some time in Rudolph II's court in Prague. It was so important to Dee that when his scribe Edmund Kelley made contact with the angel Uriel, his first question was "Is my *Book of Soyga* of any excellency?" to which he got a characteristically evasive angelic answer. It was known that Dee found it impossible to decipher the book and that it was of significant hermetic interest, but until 20 years ago, it was believed lost – hence the speculation that the volume Dee was talking about was what we now know as the Voynich Manuscript. However, in 1994, Dee scholar Deborah Harkness located two existing versions of the book; the one Dee probably owned was at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, catalogued as *Aldaraia sive Soyga vocor*, and a second copy was at the British Library under the name *Tractatus Astrologico Magicus*. There are minor differences between the two manuscripts, but they do not resemble the Voynich Manuscript in any way; rather they consist of incantations and instructions relating to demonology, magic and astrology, as well

as lists of conjunctions, lunar mansions, and the names and genealogies of angels, none of which are unusual in occult tomes of the period. It does refer to a number of otherwise unknown (and still missing) manuscripts such as *liber E*, *liber Os*, *liber dignus*, *liber Sipal*, and *liber Munob*, which embody the manuscript's tendency to reverse words: *Munob* is *Bonum* (the highest good) reversed, *Sipal* is *Lapis* (stone), and, in fact, *Soyga* is *Agyos* (Greek for 'Holy') backwards. What is unique are 36 squares of letters encoding further information, and it was the impenetrability of these squares that drove Dee to consult Uriel. Since their rediscovery though, these have been deciphered. Researcher Jim Reeds worked out the mathematical formula used to construct the tables, based on seed words given for the tables in the manuscript.³ However, while Reeds could work out what the squares decoded to, it still remains completely unclear what they actually mean, as they take the form of magic squares popular in the cabalistic magic of the Renaissance, and their significance has

been lost.

Also exercising a considerable amount of scholarly interest and speculation is the *Rohonc Codex*. The nature of this volume is closer to that of the *Voynich Manuscript*, but it is far less well known in Western Europe, being Hungarian in apparent origin and with research on it being mostly published in that language. The book is 448 pages long, with each page containing between nine and 14 rows of symbols accompanied by crude illustrations. The symbols are similar in some ways to runes, but there are 792 different ones – which mean the set of symbols is at least 10 times the size of the largest known alphabet – while the simple illustrations include religious, military and civilian scenes. These do appear to represent life in eastern central Europe, although aspects of them suggest the culture it represents included Christian, Islamic and Hindu symbolism. The book surfaced in 1838, when Count Gusztáv Batthyány donated his library, containing the book, to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; but apart from a vague reference in the library catalogue of one of the Count's ancestors about a century before, its provenance prior to that is shrouded in mystery. Analysis of the paper upon which it is written suggests it was made in Venice in the 1530s, but it is difficult to draw any further conclusions from the physical structure of the book. Various scholars have had a go at the script over the years, coming to a variety of conclusions. One researcher decided it was written in a Sumerian/Hungarian hybrid language – primarily by turning the book upside down and spotting what looked like a Sumerian ligature, then assigning Latin letters to the other symbols on the basis of resemblance, rearranging letter order as needs be to get an intelligible result.⁴ This seems to have been an attempt to bolster a fringe theory that the Hungarian language is descended from Sumerian, and, needless to say, has come in for some criticism. Other scholars have interpreted it as being in an obscure Dacian/Romanian script, while an Indian researcher, Mahesh Kumar Singh, decided that the whole thing was written left-to-right, top-to-bottom, (the lines, though, are right-justified, suggesting a right-left text direction) and in a previously undocumented version of Brahmi script from India, although this has been dismissed as a hoax. More credible is that it is in a version of an old Hungarian alphabet, and concerns aspects of the New Testament, which at least is relatively consistent with some of the illustrations.

In recent years, computer analysis has suggested the right-left/top-bottom orientation of the script is correct, and that, like the *Voynich Manuscript*, the text is some form of language and not gibberish. Work is going on to try and use analogies from the illustrations to extract meaning from the text, in a similar way employed by Bax with Voynich. Nonetheless, most literary authorities in Hungary have decided that the *Rohonc Codex* is a hoax created



TOP: The *Rohonc Codex*. ABOVE: Pages from the *Book of Soyga*, which refers to a number of lost texts.

THE VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT

THE WORLD'S MOST BAFFLING BOOK FINDS A PUBLISHER...

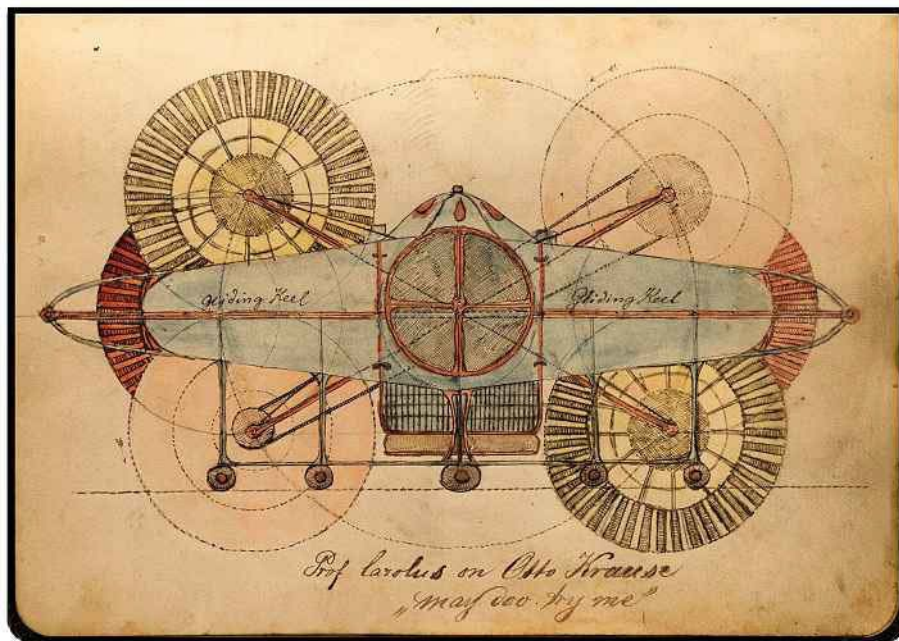
BEINECKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY



While the latest research suggests that the Voynich Manuscript (VM) is written in a language, albeit an unknown one, many previous attempts to penetrate the text's mysteries have treated it as a code or cipher. William Newbold, professor of mediæval philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania and a WWI codebreaker, announced he'd cracked it in 1921, asserting that the manuscript had been written by 13th century polymath Roger Bacon and concerned his invention of the telescope and microscope centuries before their modern 'rediscovery'. Newbold, though, had disappeared down a rabbit hole of decoding, turning to Hebrew Kabala, mediæval Catalan, and the idea that every pen stroke in every character held its own individual meaning. The drawings in the manuscript are equally baffling: botanical illustrations of unidentified plant species; astronomical and astrological drawings; female nudes with swollen abdomens immersed in fluids; medicinal roots, herbs and vessels, and so on. Since Newbold, other researchers have suggested that the VM is variously: "the 16th century equivalent of the Kinsey Report", dealing with women's ailments and contraception; the narrative of an ancient Khazar civil war, written in an archaic form of Ukrainian; a secret Cathar liturgy concerned with fasting to death; and a 16th century forgery designed to con Rudolf II out of the considerable sum of 600 ducats.

The VM was in the news last month (*D.Telegraph*, 21 Aug 2016) when Spanish publisher Siloe announced it had been granted the rights to print a limited edition of 898 replica copies – although the price is likely to be between £6,000 and £7,000. Perhaps a better place to start is at Yale's Beinecke Library (<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/voynich-manuscript>), where the entire manuscript can be viewed in digital form.





by Sámuel Literáti Nemes in the 1830s. This was a solution first proposed in the 1860s, as Nemes was known to have carried out a number of literary hoaxes around the time that the codex first appeared, despite there being no evidence at all to connect him to the book.

DREAMS OF FLYING

It would be wrong, though, to assume that mysterious manuscripts only emerge from hermetic Renaissance libraries. Equally strange works of a far more modern provenance also exist. For example, there are the Journals of the Sonora Aero Club, compiled by Charles Dellschau and recording the activities of his friends in the 1850s. Sonora is in California, about 130 miles (200km) east of San Francisco, and in the 1850s was a thriving gold rush town, and if Dellschau's journals are to be taken at face value, the home of an energetic society that met weekly in a saloon, to drink, talk and plan the building of extraordinary flying machines.⁵ There are 12 of these journals, and they came to light in the 1960s after a house fire in Houston, Texas. Following the blaze, the owners turfed out a large quantity of largely unburned loft junk and took it to the local landfill – from where someone rescued these 12 volumes, which ended up under a pile of carpet at Fred Washington's OK Trading Post. It was here that a student, Mary Jane Victor, spotted them and brought them to the attention of local art collector Dominique de Menil, who acquired them. The 12 volumes are roughly bound and held together with shoelaces, and in total amount to about 2,000 pages. Each page is a double-sided collage, consisting of drawings, newspaper clippings (which Dellschau rather charmingly called 'press blooms'), watercolour paintings, and calligraphy in a code that has only been partially deciphered. The pages are dated and numbered, with the count starting at 1601, implying that there were another 1,600 pages that have been lost or destroyed.

THE JOURNALS CAME TO LIGHT AFTER A HOUSE FIRE IN HOUSTON



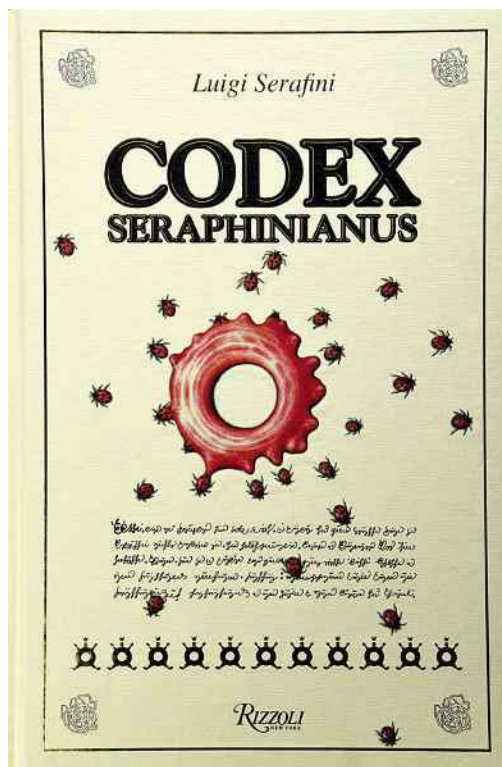
TOP: An amazing flying machine from Charles Dellschau's *Recolections second part* [sic]. ABOVE: One of Dellschau's astonishing collages incorporating newspaper clippings, or "press blooms" as he called them.

They tell the tale of the activities of the Aero Club, and preserve the designs of the flying machines they allegedly developed and built – Dellschau illustrates at least 100 different ships, with names such as Aero Mio, Aero Jourdan, Aero Trump, Aero Schnabel and Aero Mary, driven by a secret anti-gravity substance that Dellschau called "supe" that both lifted and powered these vehicles. They are equipped with other revolutionary technology too: gliding keels, generators powered by chemical reactions, bendable rubber joints, revolving shear blades, retractable landing gear. The ships have decks supported by striped balloon pontoons; there are bright-coloured helicopter-like contraptions and sinister striped war dirigibles, all crewed by smart little gentlemen, and sometimes a cat too. There are tales of their flying exploits, full of jolly breakfasts and exciting journeys, although there are the occasional disasters too: a stolen airship tangled in a Sequoia tree, its pilot dying of a broken neck, or Jacob Mischer going down in flames in the Aero Gander. The members of the club are named, and researchers have traced most of them, so it seems they did exist – even Peter Mennis, whom Dellschau describes as the pilot of the Aero Goose and creator of the "supe". When he died in the 1860s, he apparently took its formula to his grave, so the club could fly no longer and was forced to disband. None of these people, however, can be placed in Sonora at the time Dellschau claims they were there, although

there are records of them elsewhere in California, and even in Houston, where Dellschau ended up. They appear to have been a secretive bunch, though, hiding their machines and keeping outsiders away. In fact, there was not even any contemporary documentation of their efforts: Dellschau's journals were only started in 1899, after he retired, to preserve their history. Or so it would appear. It is impossible to tell whether the club actually existed, and, if it did, whether it was anything more than a forum for imaginative yarn-spinning. Certainly, nothing about Dellschau's airships suggests they could practically fly, particularly their quasi-magical motive power, the "supe". It is equally (and probably more) likely they are the florid imaginings of a retired man with too much time on his hands. Except, there is a nagging sense that this could explain something, which was not lost on UFO researcher Pete Navarro.⁶ He is convinced that Dellschau's Sonora Aero Club held the key to the 1896-7 mystery airship flap that saw sightings across 18 States, including meetings with aeronauts repairing their ships and voices heard coming from them as they passed overhead (see FT115:34-38). Navarro makes a connection between the one named airship occupant encountered in that flap, Hiram Wilson, and a Tosh Wilson, mentioned by Dellschau. Navarro claims to have decoded some of Dellschau's mysterious calligraphy, and says it claims Tosh Wilson spent seven years trying to rediscover the lost "supe" – and eventually succeeded. He also claims the texts reveal that the Sonora club was part of a mysterious larger organisation known as NYMZA. Needless to say, other ufologists have gone on to claim this was a front for aliens. Whether or not they are blueprints for mystery airships emanating from an alien-controlled secret society, Dellschau's artworks are now worth big money on the outsider art scene; when some of the pages became available on the open market in recent years they fetched upward of \$15,000 each.

THE CODEX SERAPHINIANUS

More recently, there has been the *Codex Seraphinianus*. The origins of this codex are not mysterious: it was created by Luigi Serafini, an artist, designer and architect, over three years from 1976-79 and published in two volumes in Italy in 1981.⁷ Its contents, however, are decidedly



LEFT: The *Codex Seraphinianus* created by Italian artist Luigi Serafini and published in 1981.

unusual. The *Codex* is 360 pages long and written in a cipher alphabet; in addition, it uses an imaginary language and even the page numbers are enciphered. This text is accompanied by illustrations no less baffling than those in the *Voynich Manuscript* or the *Rohonc Codex*: a couple making love gradually transform, over a sequence of illustrations, into a single crocodile, which then climbs off the bed and wanders off the page. There is a spread showing human legs supporting bizarre shapes; a father and son stand on lily pads, wearing fish costumes; a reindeer/camel hybrid carrying a human/seedpod mutant is transfixed by light bounced off a mirror mounted on a castle; bizarre Heath Robinson devices proliferate; sets of eyes peering from the sea turn out to be fish with eye-pattern bodies and eyebrow tails; one chapter, on physics, is almost totally abstract. And so on, page after page. The *Codex* consists of 11 chapters, split into two main sections. The first appears to be describing the natural world and deals with flora, fauna, and physics, while the second covers various aspects of human life, such as clothing, history, cuisine and architecture. It closes with what looks like an index, and has something that looks like an afterword at the very end. What this all

means Serafini has refused to reveal, but this has not stopped scholars giving it the kind of scrutiny that's been applied to the *Voynich Manuscript*. Encouragement was provided by the inclusion of a booklet in the back of a later edition of the book: named the *Decodex*, this actually turns out to be a series of essays on the codex itself, which, if anything, confuses things further. Analysts agree that the writing system essentially conforms to ordinary Western-style systems – i.e. it runs left-to-right in rows and involves an alphabet with uppercase and lowercase letters. Similarities with Semitic writing systems have been suggested; some letters only appear at the beginning and end of words, which is characteristic of these, while the shapes of the letters themselves reminds others of Sinhala alphabets used in languages such as Sanskrit. Very little progress has been made on the actual content, but two researchers, working independently, have cracked the numbering system for the pages, which turns out to be a variation of base 21.

However, this lack of progress may be due to the one piece of information Serafini himself has revealed. In a lecture at Oxford University in 2009 he explained that he intended the book to create the kind of impression that a child, unable to read, experiences when coming upon a book, and that it is written in what is known as an asemic script.⁸ This is writing that has the form and structure of a real text, but no meaningful content, making it something akin to a written form of glossolalia. This raises the interesting question: are all these manuscripts essentially asemic? Are they all content-free examples of automatic writing rather than fiendishly complex ciphers? Is there anything there to be decoded, or are those attempting to make sense of them either doomed to failure or the projection of their own meanings into the semantic vacuum? **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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FASHION VICTIMS

This month's Fashion Weeks in London, Paris, New York and Milan will no doubt witness some strange creations, but this is nothing new. Throughout history, people have tried to distinguish themselves from the common herd by turning to fashion and cosmetics, even when the results could be bizarre, harmful and even fatal, giving the expression "fashion victim" a whole new meaning.

MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO tightens her stays and reports from the runway.

A KILLER COMPLEXION

Smooth, youthful skin has been an ideal of beauty for millennia, due to its associations with health and fertility. In Ancient Greece, men favoured a tanned skin, the consequence of exercising in the *gymnasion*. However, since women who worked outdoors would also have been naturally tanned, pallor was considered indicative of female aristocracy, and therefore a desirable trait. To fake an alabaster complexion, women resorted, in the words of Greek poet and physician Nicander of Colophon (2nd century BC), to a "hateful brew compounded with gleaming, deadly white lead, whose fresh colour is like milk which foams all over". Lead was identified with Cronus or Saturn and could cause acute poisoning, known as saturnism. Nicander described most of its symptoms, such as hallucinations and paralysis, and recommended purgative treatments. But critical voices didn't dim its popularity: lead provided an opaque foundation, not dissimilar to a coat of plaster, a canvas over which soot could be used as eyeliner and crushed berries or flower petals as blusher.

Most contemporary sources equate the use of cosmetics with the "deceitful" nature of women, which shows that things haven't changed much over the centuries. The older woman who uses cosmetics to attract a younger lover became a comedic trope, and in Xenophon's Socratic dialogue *Oeconomicus*, Ischomachus admonishes his wife, arguing that her pallor should be a "natural" consequence of her containment within the *oikos*, not something achieved through artificial means.

The Romans also favoured lead, but their rouge of choice, cinnabar, or mercury sulfide, was less innocuous than a few crushed flower



LEFT: The Countess of Coventry died of lead poisoning aged 27. FACING PAGE: Elizabeth I in white face make-up.

stop the Romans from using it everywhere: not only on the skin, but also in architecture and statues. Mining mercury was a slow death sentence, but one that proved profitable for the Empire.

Lead continued to be used throughout the Middle Ages, an era in which a blemish, mole or birthmark could be considered solid evidence of witchcraft (the so-called "witches' marks", supposedly made by the Devil himself), with all the dire consequences such an accusation entailed. But perhaps poisonous make-up reached the height of its popularity in the Renaissance, where a "virginal" white was synonymous with beauty. Venetian Ceruse – or its more poetic denomination, "the Spirits of Saturn" – became the most sought-after cosmetic. In *A tracte containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge and Building*, Giovanni Lomazzo explains that it is "made of lead and vinegar; which mixture is naturally a

great drier". It was not only used by women to improve their complexions, but also "by chirurgions to drie up moiste sores". Women who used it, according to him, "quickly become withered and gray headed, because this dowth so mightly drie up the naturall moysture of their flesh".

Ceruse was also popular, both among men and women, in Elizabethan England. Contemporary portraits of the Queen show her as the ideal of beauty, with her golden red hair, high forehead and marble skin. In an era where pox was frequent, unblemished skin was a high-unattainable ideal. But of course, we're all the same in illness and death: the Queen famously suffered a bout of smallpox in 1562, when she was 29. It left her skin

A "VIRGINAL" WHITE WAS SYNONYMOUS WITH BEAUTY

petals. The fact that it was mined by slaves and convicts indicates that its hazardous effects (mercurialism, a disease that can cause tremors, madness and death) were widely known at the time. Again, this didn't





possession, and often the object of criminal acts. The popularity of wigs in Europe from the 16th century caused the flourishing of a profitable hair market, but also the rise of muggers who targeted women and children. In the 19th century, hair was worth twice its weight in silver, and 1869 saw outbreaks of hair theft in both New York and London. A letter to *The Times* warned readers that: “a young friend of ours has just had the whole of her hair cut off in broad daylight in Westbourne Grove”.

Arguably, although the 1980s were a strong contender, peak big hair occurred in the 18th century. When Queen Marie Antoinette wore her hair in a *pouf* at the coronation of her husband Louis XVI in 1775, she started a trend that would define the period. Her own mother, Maria Theresa of Austria, lectured her on what was hair-appropriate in a letter written in the same year: “[The papers] say that from the roots it measures 36 *pouces* high and with all the feathers and ribbons that hold all of that up! You know that I have always been of the opinion that one should follow fashion moderately, but never carry it to excess. A pretty young queen full of charms has no need of all these follies.”

Marie Antoinette clearly didn’t think so. Although a fashion icon of the time, she hadn’t been the first one to sport this hairstyle: the previous year, the Duchess of Chartres had appeared at the opera with a monumental creation by hairdresser Leonard Autié, including decorations and ornaments such as ships, ostrich feathers and miniature animals.

LEFT: Marie Antoinette, whose elaborate coiffures marked the 18th century as the era of peak big hair.
BELOW: The hairdressing excesses of the Ancien Regime are satirised in this print from around 1750: “One must learn to suffer for one’s beauty”.

scarred.¹ After her illness, she resorted to applying thicker layers of make-up. The fate of her royal skin wasn’t dissimilar to that of the commoners: lead and mercury lotions caused it to react; breakouts and impurities were covered by increasingly thicker layers, often without washing the previous layer off, and eventually the skin was corroded by the chemicals at work. This is why wearing skin patches became fashionable, as evidenced by a peddler rhyme from 1640 that offers “patches... of ev-ry cut for pimples and for scars”.

Despite health hazards, the use of lead in beauty products continued well into the 19th century. The Countess of Coventry, a society beauty who died of lead poisoning in 1760 aged 27, was branded “a victim of cosmetics”. In 1869, several cases of lead palsy from the use of cosmetics were studied by the American Medical Association. At the same time, arsenic-based cosmetics were advertised everywhere, and even now, according to a report from the WHO, mercury is still used in skin lightening products.

HAIR LIKE A RAT’S NEST

Thick, lush hair is indicative of youth, health and fertility. Because of its aesthetic value and its social role, hair was a valuable



LOREN HOLMES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



TOP LEFT: A typical Roman unibrow in a portrait of the wife of baker Terentius Neo from Pompeii, first century AD. **ABOVE CENTRE:** A kohl container inscribed for Queen Tiye, 18th Dynasty, Egypt 1410-1372 BC. **ABOVE RIGHT:** "Geisha Blackening her Teeth at 1pm", a Japanese woodblock print of 1880.

The taller the hair, the more fashionable the wearer: but such trends required a thorough dedication and industrial quantities of styling pomade. Usual ingredients were beef marrow, bear grease, mutton fat or pig lard, the latter being the most expensive since it had a "milder" odour. Essential oils, such as hazelnut oil, lemon and clove oil were added to disguise the stench, doubling up as flea, moth and tick repellents. The hair was then covered with a special powder containing corn, wheat flour, or milled and sieved starch, sometimes dyed blue, pink or lilac.

The *coiffure* was so elaborate that it couldn't be redone easily, and for this reason it was washed as little as possible. Women slept over several pillows, wearing special nightcaps to protect it from mice and rats. These caps couldn't have stopped other vermin, hence the widespread use of silver claws, often laid out with the silverware for guests to idly scratch their heads at dinner parties.

A DEADLY STARE

Eye make-up has also been used since Antiquity. The Egyptians used galena mesdemet and khol, striking green and black pigments containing toxic lead and malachite (copper). Green was the colour of the eye of Horus, a protective amulet also known as Wadjet, derived from the word "wadj", or green. The practice was thought to ward off evil spirits, and women even regularly painted the eyes of infants. Despite the toxicity of these substances, recent studies establish that some of the components reacted against bacteria present in tropical marshy areas, thus effectively protecting the wearer from infections. Eye make-up was so important that it appears in the *Book of the Dead*: "Before presenting himself at the Hall of Justice, the deceased must purify himself, dress in white garments, make up his eyes and anoint himself. Only then may he enter the realm of Osiris."

WHITE TEETH WERE THE MARK OF SAVAGES AND WILD ANIMALS

In the Renaissance, deadly nightshade acquired the more poetic name *belladonna* (beautiful woman) because it was used for cosmetic purposes: when applied to the eyes it would enlarge the pupil, creating a youthful glow and mimicking the natural effects of sexual attraction. The drug could cause visual distortion, sensitivity to light, increased heart rate and blindness. Symptoms of poisoning included confusion, hallucinations, delirium, convulsions and death.

Eyebrows have been plucked, shaved, painted and stuck on, depending on trends. Romans and Greeks favoured monobrows, which could be achieved with goat hair attached with resin. In the Heian period in Japan, the standard of beautiful eyebrows was embodied in a practice called *hikimayu*, where they were shaved and redrawn as cloud-like smudges. In the Elizabethan era, eyebrows and hairlines were plucked to emphasise a generous forehead. Later, in the 18th century, bold brows were back in fashion, and for those who weren't blessed by nature, patches of mouse fur were a popular resource.

A SMILE AS DARK AS NIGHT

For a culture obsessed with teeth whitening it is hard to imagine that black teeth were once fashionable. This was the case among Japanese aristocrats, at least from the third century. The practice was called *ohaguro*, meaning "esteemed black teeth", for which iron filings were dissolved in vinegar and

mixed with vegetable tannins from tea or gallnut powder. In his *Travels in Europe* (1795), Swedish naturalist Carl Peter Thunberg describes the method: "*Ohaguro*... is prepared from urine, filings of iron, and sakki: it is foetid and corrosive. It eats so deeply into the teeth, that it takes several days and much trouble to scrape and wash it away. It is so corrosive, that the gums and lips must be well covered while it is laid on, or it will turn them quite blue." In early periods the custom was restricted to the men, women and children of the court, but it was later only applied to the samurai class and to married women, perhaps as a symbol of fidelity. Lacquered black teeth can still be seen in geisha quarters, but also among some women in remote areas of Vietnam, where white teeth were the mark of savages, wild animals and demons.

In Elizabethan England, black teeth were also objects of desire, although for very different reasons. Sugar was an import, only affordable to the rich. Its consumption caused the upper classes to sport rotting teeth, which became a status symbol. However bizarre we may judge them now, black teeth weren't necessarily a health hazard, but the consequences of a poor dental hygiene could have well been. From the 18th century, those surgeons who began experimenting with implants did so by using the teeth of dead people, which were cheaper than those sold by the living. As quoted by Ruth Richardson in *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, a professor of anatomy at Trinity College in Dublin said in 1831: "Very many of the upper ranks carry in their mouth teeth which have been buried in the hospital fields". Some of them could end up suffering the same fate of the teeth's previous owner, since illnesses such as syphilis or tuberculosis were unknowingly transmitted in such procedures.

DEATH BY CORSET

Although in the popular imagination corsets



ABOVE LEFT: A dandy being laced into his corset by his valet, c. 1800. ABOVE RIGHT: A toxic 'Arsenic Gown' seen in an exhibition of 2014. The striking shade of green was achieved by Carl Wilhelm Scheele, mixing arsenic and copper. BELOW: The dangers of tight-lacing illustrated in an issue of *The Family Doctor*, 20 April 1893.

might be regarded as a product of 19th century fashion, they had already appeared in ancient Crete. Tight lacing had a reputation for causing health problems, something which is illustrated in one of the first versions of *Snow White*: the poisoned apple wasn't the Wicked Stepmother's first choice for murder, but a final resort after a poisoned comb and asphyxiating bodice lace failed. The message is clear: young girls, you'll be punished for your vanity.

Dizziness and fainting were frequent problems among corset users, since the pressure restricted the blood flow. Technically, tight corsets could fracture a rib, which might then puncture a lung. Brisk movements could also affect vital organs such as the spleen or the liver, and in the past, this could have been fatal. They could also cause miscarriages when worn during pregnancy (they were, in fact, used to conceal unwanted pregnancies), by inhibiting the expansion of the uterus.

However, Victorian physicians blamed corsets for a long series of other ailments, such as gallstones, prolapses and the hazy and ubiquitous hysteria. They were also thought to be responsible for weakened pelvic muscles and the delivery of children that were either crippled or developed low intelligence. But, as Valerie Steele suggests in *The Corset: A Cultural History*, corsets were associated with sex, so these reactions would have been a way of perpetuating the image of

women as maternal figures, domestic angels restricted to the family sphere, instead of more "mundane" human beings with earthly inclinations.

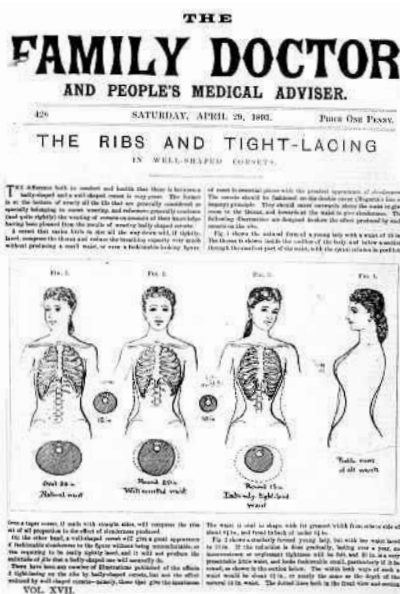
Even though in popular culture corsets are linked to frivolous young women, men also wore them, particularly dandies in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In 1821 King George IV almost fainted due to the constriction of his corset. In 1912, stage actor

Joseph Hennella, a female impersonator, collapsed on stage and died three hours later. He was wearing a "corset tightly laced" that he used to conceal his "increasing girth". Hospital physicians concluded that the corset "caused a kidney trouble and induced a tendency to apoplexy".

DEADLY SHADES

The most expensive pigments have always produced the most desirable colours, allowing the wearer to stand out from the masses, who wore muted, natural colours. Purple is the emblem of royalty because Tyrian purple, obtained from certain snails, was the most expensive pigment, and although there was nothing deadly in this substance, other pigments, such as the already mentioned cinnabar, were certainly hazardous.

Before Carl Wilhelm Scheele developed a new method in the Georgian era, green was achieved by overlaying blue and yellow. By mixing arsenic and copper, Scheele produced a bright emerald green, highly toxic but remarkably intense both under gaslight and natural light, which may explain its popularity. In Britain, it was used in clothes, glass, soaps, lampshades, wallpapers, children's toys, candles, confectionary and even artificial flowers. Mauve, the new hue created by William Henry Perkin in 1856, also enjoyed the same popularity. Sadly, arsenic and picric acid were among its ingredients.



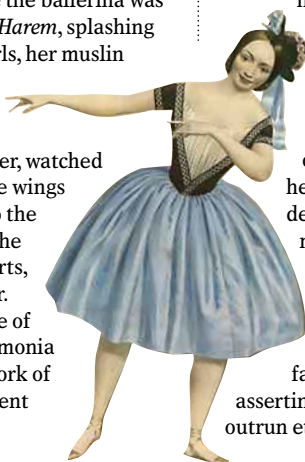


ABOVE: The fatal combination of theatre gas lamps and highly flammable muslin ballet skirts was illustrated by a tragic incident at Philadelphia's Continental Theater in 1861 in which at least eight ballerinas perished. **BELOW:** Clara Webster suffered fatal burns whilst dancing at London's Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1845.

THE BALLERINA HOLOCAUST

Before the arrival of electricity, gaslight and fireplaces presented many risks for the fashionable. Crinolines, used to support skirts in the 19th century and worn by women of all social classes, were highly flammable, and it is estimated that crinoline fires killed 3,000 women between 1850 and the late 1870s in the UK. The garment also caused numerous bizarre accidents, dragging women into the sea or blowing them off cliffs.

The fatal combination of gas lamps and highly flammable muslin skirts was responsible for the tragic deaths of several young Victorian ballerinas. The papers of March 1845 mention the "Shocking death of Miss Clara Webster". While the ballerina was performing in *Revolt of the Harem*, splashing water on the other slave-girls, her muslin dress brushed against a gas lamp and caught fire. The horrified audience, among which was her mother, watched her burn. A carpenter in the wings intervened, throwing her to the ground and extinguishing the fire. Despite his heroic efforts, Webster died two days later. The coroner advised the use of a solution of muriate of ammonia over the muslin and a network of wire over the lamps to prevent similar accidents in future.



There were others after Clara Webster. The solution of ammonia made the muslin stiff and uncomfortable to wear, giving it a yellowish, not very attractive, tinge. Emma Livry, the star of the Paris Opera Ballet, died in 1863; Julia McEwen, Fanny Smith, and others from Marseilles, New York, Liverpool and Naples were further casualties.

THE HORROR, THE HORROR

The list of fashion-related deaths and injuries is never-ending: the so-called 'lotus feet' caused by foot binding; hatters afflicted by mercurialism; collars that induced apoplexy; terrifying tapeworm diets; crocodile excrement baths and face masks; powdered human skull concoctions to promote vigour; leeches to induce pallor; urine baths for supple skin; radioactive cosmetics to "activate circulation".

We may laugh at the excesses of our forebears just as we shake our heads when we see the latest celebrity deformed by cosmetic surgery or numbed by injections of botulinum toxin. Perhaps we should pity our human condition instead, and admit that this will continue for as long as we are humans. Isn't fashion, after all, a clumsy way of asserting our unique identity, an attempt to outrun eternal oblivion?

NOTES

1 According to popular belief, lead poisoning also made Queen Elizabeth bald, even though there are sources that remark that she still had hair in her later years. Hair loss is indeed a result of lead poisoning, though it only appears in advanced stages.

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THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

13. GREED, GOD, BEARDS - AND DUELS

"All the world is strange, except thee and me," said Robert Owen, approximately, to his business partner William Allen, "and even thou art a little queer." We all recognise odd behaviours in individuals we know, even in ourselves if we're lucky, and find ways of avoiding them or working around them, and sometimes even of finding ways to explain them. The best kind – wits, comics, unselfconscious eccentrics, certain kinds of *agent provocateur* – we find entertaining, and often don't enquire very closely into why they are the way they are, although perhaps we should. Monsters, on the other hand, tend to be put under all manner of microscopes, but remain enigmatic, for all the ink spilled. The 20th century's superstars of depravity and depredation – such as Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot – persistently defy wholly credible explanation. Part of the reason for our bafflement and retreat into (perhaps correct) terms like 'evil', is the sheer scale on which these people maimed, terrified, tortured and slaughtered; but in pondering that, we cannot avoid the profoundly discomfiting truth that they required – and acquired – huge numbers of accomplices in realising their unspeakable ambitions. As individuals we all do strange things. *En masse* we're capable of doing and believing even stranger ones, some quite horrible, but to general relief by no means all of them are the product of unalloyed wickedness. As we see in this month's classic fortean volume.

Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds by Charles Mackay was first published in 1841; its final, expanded edition came out 11 years later. Not all the many delusions it describes were popular, and not all the madness it mentions involved crowds. But it's a hard title to beat. (This is also a thick square book that's a bit tricky to read upon the interior-sprung – probably more so in a hammock, rowing boat or space capsule.) Crowds, delusions, madness and greed are nonetheless the themes of the first three chapters, which describe the Mississippi Scheme of 1719–21 in France, the British South Sea Company bubble (which hit its peak in 1720), and the tulip mania that overtook the Netherlands in the 1630s. Mackay is better on anecdotes and the people involved than on the financial intricacies of the first two, and his accuracy on the extent and effects of the tulip fad has been questioned by economists and historians. Wikipedia, for once, has a well-sourced and informative article on the mania, for those who want to read further. Loyalists will look to erstwhile FT publisher Mike Dash's *Tulipomania* (Gollancz, 1999) for a critical account.

Mackay, however, was a journalist by trade, and was after a good story. The birth of the Mississippi Scheme lay in Scotsman John Law's essentially sound idea of replacing gold, silver and copper coinage with paper notes. The notes' value would be assured, in that no bank could

issue more than could be covered by assets in land, bullion, or the coinage itself. Law (1671–1729) was a tall, handsome dandy who for years lived by gambling in the great cities of Europe – he had skipped gaol in England after killing a man in a duel over a lady – the while refining his economic ideas and breaking the hearts (and perhaps more) of delectable aristocratic maidens, until he happened to be in the right place at the right time. Namely, Paris in 1715, when Louis XIV died. His heir was but five years old, and the Duc d'Orléans became his regent. He knew Law personally, and was well aware of his ideas about paper money. Thanks to the Sun King's penchant for waging expensive wars, France was in effect bankrupt: and revenue from taxes, already inadequate to cover the interest on the national debt, was depleted by the speculations of its gatherers. D'Orléans was sympathetic when Law "proposed to the regent... to establish a company that should have the exclusive privilege of trading to the great river Mississippi and the province of Louisiana, on its western bank. The country was supposed to abound in the precious metals; and the company, supported by the profits of their exclusive commerce, were to be the sole farmers of the taxes and sole coiners of money. Letters patent were issued, incorporating the company, in August 1717. The capital was divided into two hundred thousand shares of five hundred livres each, the whole of which might be paid

in *billets d'état*, at their nominal value, although worth no more than a hundred and sixty livres in the market."

It sounded like a good idea at the time. The notes became more valuable than their face value, while there was a frenzy to buy shares in the company. The latter had, in reality, nothing substantial to offer, but d'Orléans saw the vast profits accruing to the French treasury and in stages converted Law's company into a national bank and extended its remit to a monopoly on virtually all France's trade and tax affairs – which in reality it had no hope of handling. And meanwhile, it issued amounts of paper money that vastly exceeded any ability to redeem it in metal, and at the same time kept devaluing the coinage. In effect, the inflated (and inflating) value of the scheme's stocks was underwriting the paper currency. There was much vain resistance in parliament. Law too saw the folly of this, and was fired for his pains. Mackay takes one lightly through the madness of what followed until, of course, it all ends in tears, with the largely blameless Law exiled and dying in penury. Today, what d'Orléans did would be called 'quantitative easing' (of which central banks have been so confidently fond of late), and the tale Mackay tells is useful ammunition for those who would argue for a return to some kind of gold standard for currency; or even that governments should, from time to time, at least try to learn from history. As if.

Having covered greed in the affairs and failures of the Mississippi scheme, South Sea bubble and tulip-mania, Mackay moves to the no less economically peculiar business of alchemy (his spelling) and its many would-be practitioners. In this long and detailed treatment we don't get much by way of recipes or discussion of their cryptic language and symbols. These may have been deliberately indecipherable (Mackay suggests no allegedly successful alchemist would pass on his esoteric knowledge, even to his fellow practitioners), on the altogether logical grounds that if we could all transmute base metals into gold, we'd all end up as poor as we were before. To us, having a sub-zero interest in the subject, this omission of the impenetrable comes as a relief. Instead we have potted biographies of alchemy's adherents, several of which

are wonderfully gossipy and scandalous, all of which end in failure, sometimes involving fraud, or at least confidence tricks, and frequently delusion. We get a good insight into the charlatany of the Comte de St Germain, who rarely *quite* claimed to be hundreds if not thousands of years old, or even an alchemist, but let others infer as much from his fanciful elaborations on his erudition and seemingly inexhaustible memory. The really rather sad tale of Dr John Dee and his mutually manipulative relationship with Edward Kelly, as Mackay tells it, would make fine Sunday-night television. As would the most entertaining section – that on Joseph Balsamo, better known as the Count de Cagliostro, and his genuinely aristocratic (but fortune-deprived) wife, whose pulchritude played no small part in their nefarious endeavours, which, like Dee's, sometimes involved purporting to raise the spirits of the dead. After many an adventure and narrow squeak, they were finally nabbed in Italy by the Pope as freemasons, heretics and sorcerers; he was condemned to life imprisonment, she to immurement in a nunnery (spot the difference, eh?).

Next up in the book are chapters on modern prophecies, fortune telling, 'the magnetisers' from Paracelsus to contemporary 'animal magnetism', and the truly strange brief survey of the influence of politics and religion on the hair and beard. Mackay starts by slightly misquoting St Paul (1 Corinthians 11:14), which the King James version gives as: "Does not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him?" Read on in the Epistle, though, and it becomes a trifle clearer why Paul says this, and enjoins men to pray bareheaded. Paul sought to make Christianity distinct from its Judaic parent. Jewish men wore their hair long and prayed with their heads covered. Jewish women traditionally covered their hair at all times. Paul enjoined men to shear their locks and pray bareheaded, and women to regard their hair as an ornament, but to cover their heads when praying.

From the early Middle Ages in Europe, Paul's by then hardly-relevant injunction led to various ecclesiastical decrees, fulminations and anathemas against men growing tresses and beards. Mackay reports: "St Wulstan [1008–1095], Bishop of Worcester, was peculiarly indignant whenever he saw a man with long hair. He declaimed against the practice as one highly immoral, criminal, and beastly. He continually carried a small knife in his pocket, and whenever any body offending



LEFT: Charles Mackay: journalist, poet, songwriter and chronicler of folly.

enamoured of their curls, more-or-less willingly coughed up their kopeks, much to the benefit of the imperial coffers.

The next chapter covers the Crusades, which Mackay justly regards with some cynicism – "Europe expended millions of her treasures, and the blood of two millions of her children; and a handful of quarrelsome knights retained possession of Palestine for about one hundred years!" – and doesn't shirk the appalling rapacity and bloodthirsty antisemitism of the Second Crusade as it wended its way across Europe. Then follow chapters on witchcraft (or more particularly the burning and hanging of alleged witches), slow poisoners, haunted houses, popular follies of great cities (mostly on fads in London slang), the popularity of thieves and outlaws (still going strong), duels and ordeals, ending with an unenchanted survey of the religious relics industry. Surprisingly, Mackay seems not to have heard of the tragicomic

"THE BOOKS
THAT THE
WORLD CALLS
IMMORAL ARE
BOOKS THAT
SHOW THE
WORLD ITS
OWN SHAME."

Oscar Wilde

in this respect knelt before him to receive his blessing, he would whip it out slyly, and cut off a handful, and then, throwing it in his face, tell him to cut off all the rest, or he would go to hell." For the most part, Europe's royalty and aristocracy ignored the Church's strictures. Over the centuries, fashion was more powerful than piety. Shorn versus luxurious locks did distinguish the violently opposed sides in the bloody English Civil War, but no more than a muttering was heard from the Establishment in the 1960s when cheerfully rebellious hippies, and then youth in general, went for the hirsute look. Mackay concludes his chapter by recounting the crafty tax imposed on his hairier male subjects by Peter the Great. Russians, much

duel between Messrs Grandpré and de Pique of Paris in 1808, so we shall regale you with it. It seems that M. de Grandpré discovered the perhaps aptly named Mlle Tirevit, a dancer or thespian of the operatic class, tenderly ministering to the equally well-named M. de Pique in a manner that Grandpré felt should more properly have been bestowed upon his own person. He demanded satisfaction. Apparently considering themselves to be of elevated mind, the pair took to the air in hot air balloons, of identical design, specially constructed for the occasion. These ascended to some 2,000ft (600m) above Paris, whereupon the antagonists opened hostilities – with blunderbusses, no less. M. de Pique fired first, but missed. M. de Grandpré then fired his mighty piece, and holed his opponent's balloon. Gravity prevailed: the contraption plummeted from the sky, crashed into a rooftop, and splattered M. de Pique and his unlucky pilot across the tiles. Not an example of the madness of crowds, exactly, but certainly of four foolhardy folk who provided a spectacle for a vulgar multitude. **FT**

Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1852/1932. Also available in other reprints (see Amazon), and online from Project Gutenberg, and (PDF) from http://www.classicly.com/books/memoirs-of-extraordinary-popular-delusions-and-the-madness-of-crowds/download_in_format/pdf

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forum



A new home for the Nanteos Cup

TED HARRISON explains how the 'Welsh Holy Grail' has finally found a safe home in Aberystwyth



TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, and regular FT contributor. His latest book is *The Death and Resurrection of Elvis Presley*.

The famed Nanteos Cup has a new home. After a turbulent and disputed history, culminating in its recent theft and mysterious return (see **FT319:20, 331:23**), it is now safely housed in a glass case at The National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

It is barely recognisable as a cup at all – just a small surviving section, barely 4in (10cm) across, of a wooden bowl. Yet it is a powerful relic with reputed healing powers. Some call it the Welsh Holy Grail, connecting it with the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper. In other legends, it is a cup fashioned from a piece of the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified.

For many years, the cup was owned by the Powell family of Nanteos – a mansion and estate in Cardiganshire, Wales. The story goes that at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, during the reign of Henry VIII, the cup was brought in secret to Nanteos by seven monks from the Cistercian abbey of Ystrad Fflur (Strata Florida) some 15 miles (24km) inland. They hoped the relic would be safe there; while the abbey was never restored, and is now a ruin, the cup was passed down the generations.

It was reputed to have healing properties. The sick drank from it, hoping for a cure, and some even chewed the edges to ingest a piece of the relic. The Powell family would lend the cup, on request, but always asked for money or valuables as surety, to be redeemed on its safe return. A scrap of paper has survived, dated November 1857, showing a pledge of £1 to secure the cup and a note of its safe return.

The cup was shown in public for



the first time in 1878 at a meeting in Lampeter of the Cambrian Archaeological Society, and its reputation spread further afield. George Powell (1842-1882), the then owner, was an incurable romantic and loved to encourage and embellish the tales of Nanteos: one unverified, and unlikely, story is that Richard Wagner visited the house and wrote his opera *Parsifal* after seeing the cup.

The Nanteos Cup, though, is probably not a 2,000-year-old holy relic but a mediæval mazer, a drinking bowl popular with monks for use on special occasions, dating from the 14th or 15th century. It has, however, never been carbon-dated and the wood from which it is carved, wych elm, is not suitable for dendrological dating – so the stories persist, and when the last family owner, Fiona Mirylees (whose mother had inherited Nanteos from her cousin Margaret Powell in 1952), handed the cup to the Library she said that

she hoped its healing powers would continue to be recognised.

Nanteos Mansion was sold in 1961 and is now a hotel, but the Mirylees family kept the cup and continued to lend it on request. Two years ago, it was stolen when on loan to an elderly woman in Herefordshire who believed

in its curative properties. A reward was offered for its safe return and an appeal was broadcast on BBC Crimewatch. "I don't want to say we are hunting the Holy Grail," a police spokesman said, "but we are investigating a burglary".

A year later, the cup was handed over to the police at a pre-arranged rendezvous. No details have been released and no charges have been brought. The family suspects the police know who was responsible, but what really matters to them is that the Nanteos Cup has been recovered.

The police believe its theft was well planned. Might it have been taken to heal someone who did not wish to reveal their identity, or was the burglary associated with a spate of thefts of other religious objects in the area?

The family concluded, reluctantly, that it was unwise to keep so sacred a relic in private hands and it was offered to the National Library of Wales.

So what exactly is the Nanteos Cup and how did it gain its sacred reputation? The archaeologist Professor David Austin, of The University of Wales Trinity St David, believes it could well be the cup used at Strata Florida for drinking the waters of the abbey's holy well. Over time, in local folklore the reputed supernatural healing properties of the waters came to be associated with the drinking vessel. "Recent work at Strata Florida now suggests an important role for water, drawn from an anciently sacred landscape, in the Abbey's foundation design and purpose. Much of this coincides with elements of the tradition assigned to the famous Nanteos Cup".

Whether the monks who rescued the cup from the king's agents believed that what they held in their care was indeed the Holy Grail, or perhaps a piece of the True Cross, is now no longer known. But they must have believed it was something more than an ordinary wooden cup to have chosen it, of all the treasures of the abbey, to be saved.

"The Holy Grail never existed in the old county of Cardiganshire," says folklorist Juliette Wood, "but a flourishing folk culture is alive and well." **FT**

ABOVE: The Nanteos Cup.

BELOW: George Powell, one-time custodian of the Cup and embellisher of its legend.



Poked by a Pokémon!

As *Pokémon Go* mania spreads across the world like electronic ebola, **SD TUCKER** explores the lovable little creatures' origins in the realms of Japanese folklore and takes the opportunity to bemoan the decline of that nation's once-great videogame industry.



SD TUCKER is a recovering *otaku* whose books include *Paranormal Merseyside*, *The Hidden Folk* and *Forgotten Science*. He will be writing more about Japan and its fringe politics for FT soon.

Zombies are real – you can see them, every day of the week now, shuffling along in public, eyes glued to their smartphones, too busy Hoovering up stray Squirtles and Jigglypuffs to notice that they are about to stray into minefields, walk off cliffs or blunder straight into traps laid for them by unscrupulous tech-literate muggers who understand how to set up a fake PokéStop. One addict absent-mindedly climbed a tree in search of rare Poké-beasts, and had to be rescued by the fire brigade; another group was saved by search-and-rescue teams after getting lost in a cave in Wiltshire while hunting underground Pokémon. Seeing that absurd but apparently necessary Health and Safety messages along the lines of 'Do not play *Pokémon Go* while driving' now pop up in the game as standard, it can only be a matter of time before Nintendo's smash-hit augmented-reality smartphone game of the summer appears in FT's 'Strange Deaths' column. So confused have some Poké-addicts now become about the difference between fantasy and reality that the imaginary monsters themselves have even begun usurping the role of Greys, Old Hags and other such chest-squatting nightmares in the realm of sleep-paralysis cases, with a young Russian woman complaining to Moscow police that she had woken up in her bed one night in August to find herself being raped by a giant Pokémon.¹ According to the unnamed 'victim', she had been playing *Pokémon Go* alone in her room before falling asleep, only to awake some time later to find the human-sized cartoon creature lying on top of her body and trying to mate with her. As she shook off her slumber, the Pokémon disappeared – but spookily her smartphone could still detect its presence there on the bed. As for which Pokémon was actually responsible, initial reports do not say – but, given its

apparent *modus operandi*, I'd guess a rogue Drowzee.

Those *otaku* who know their 'Mon, however, may not have been entirely surprised by the idea of Poké-rape, knowing as they do that several of the Pocket Monsters are based upon figures from Japanese folklore known as *yokai*. Little known in the West prior to the release of the 2001 Studio Ghibli animation *Spirited Away*, and the appearance of FT-contributor Richard Freeman's popular *Great Yokai Encyclopaedia* book in 2010, the *yokai* are the often very weird – and occasionally highly perverted – ghosts, monsters and demons of Japanese folklore. For example, the adorable yellow electric mouse-thing Pikachu, the most famous Pokémon of all, is a mere *kawaii* (cute) cousin of the folkloric 'thunderbeast' Raij, who is said to fall to Earth during storms and, like Pikachu, to have power over lightning-bolts. An odder choice to



ABOVE: The *yokai* Yuki-Onna. At the top of the facing page is her Pokéverse equivalent, named Frosslass.

BELOW: *Pokémon Go* zombies now shuffle along the streets of cities the world over, their pale features illuminated by the eerie light cast by their phones.

be immortalised as a Pokémon was the *yokai* Yuki-Onna, or 'Snow-Woman', a sort of succubus who became Frosslass in the Nintendo games. Yuki-Onna is generally depicted in legend as a beautiful naked ghost-maiden doomed to wander through the snowy wastes of Japan forever, after dying during a snowstorm. Her skin is so white that, often, the only way you can see her coming is by spotting her seemingly disembodied dark black tresses, eyes and pubic hair through the falling snowflakes. No ordinary spectre, she is a kind of soul-vampire who will put a man to sleep, paralyse him and then drain all his life-force and warmth away through sexual intercourse, much like Yoko Ono. In the actual game, Nintendo's much-sanitised Frosslass character simply deals out ice-type attacks against opponents rather than molesting them to death, but would still be recognisable as a version of Yuki-Onna to any native gamer.

Recalling the 1990s, 16-bit heyday of Nintendo with its SNES, and Sega with its MegaDrive, it becomes clear that dozens of games back then featured unnoticed echoes of Japanese folk-culture. Why does Tails, the fox sidekick of Sega's speedy blue hedgehog Sonic, have two tails sticking out of his behind, for instance? The obvious answer was so he could whirl them around like the blades of a helicopter and boost his way through levels at top-speed, but there



PAUL J RICHARDS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

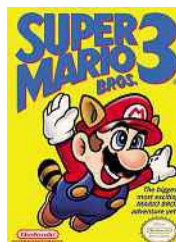
was more to it than that; in Japanese myth, after living for 100 years an ordinary fox becomes a god-like *kitsune*-fox, developing an extra tail and various supernatural abilities (see FT214:30-37). Tails must have been one of these. Another puzzling conundrum was why Mario developed the ability to fly after donning his raccoon-suit power-up, as depicted on the front-cover box-art of Nintendo's 1988 NES classic *Super Mario Bros 3*. Mario donning a cape enabling him to fly like Superman in 1990's SNES sequel *Super Mario World* made sense, but raccoons can't fly... can they? They can in Japan. A rare version of the same power-up transformed the heroic Italian plumber into Tanooki Mario, who had the additional ability to transform briefly into an invincible statue. This was a reference to the Japanese raccoon-dog, or *tanuki*, a real animal credited with several different magical abilities in Japan's legends, such as flight and shape-shifting. By adopting the guise of the *tanuki*, Mario took these self-same abilities upon himself, like a chubby 8-bit shaman.² What Nintendo never made explicit, however, was the source of the raccoon-dog's powers – his enchanted testicles, which can grow to massive size, filled as they are with pure magic. Other references to Japanese *fortena* were more fleeting; Konami's exhilarating SNES platform-shooter *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels*, for instance, features some fearsome human-faced dogs, seen rummaging in trashcans on the very first level. Just hideous aliens? Perhaps not; in the 1980s, an urban legend spread across Japan that a human-faced dog called the *Jinmenken* had been bred in a laboratory from which it had later escaped. The most famous alleged sighting of it was outside an urban restaurant... rummaging in some trashcans.

Knowing your folklore could actually help you complete some old games. In the original GameBoy titles, the Pokémon Magikarp seems initially to be a useless river-fish, who flops around helplessly during team-battles. However, train it up to Level 20 and Magikarp will evolve into a powerful snake-



like river-dragon called Gyarados; a surprise for Western gamers, but not for those who know the old oriental legend of ordinary carp leaping over China's mythical waterfall-topping 'Dragon Gate' and being transformed similarly. One of the most fiendish puzzles in Nintendo's much-loved 1991 adventure *Zelda III: A Link to the Past*, meanwhile, centred around knowing how to gain the 'earthquake medallion' necessary for your quest. So difficult was the solution that the UK version came with a sealed booklet, telling players what to do – if you wanted the medallion's power to cause tremors, you had to visit a giant catfish lurking in a river and make him an offering. An obscure solution to a Western gamer, but not to the Japanese, raised as they are on tales of the *Jishin Namazu*, a legendary world-spanning catfish whose writhings beneath the sea are said to cause the earthquakes which so often hit Japan. I also recall being somewhat bemused in the middle of the 1998 N64 title *Legend of the Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon*, when asked to feed a green water-monster a cucumber in order to progress further on my journey. This was an unexpected request to me, but not to Japanese players who would have recognised the creature instantly as a *kappa*, a type of watery *yokai* notoriously addicted to cucumbers.

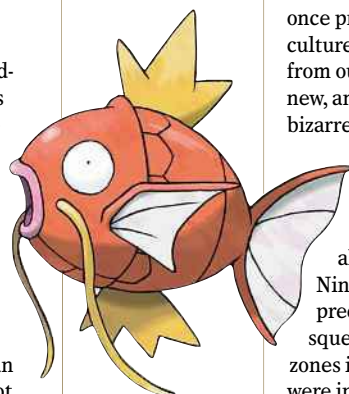
Konami's *Mystical Ninja* titles are worth examining as models of how the weirdness of Japanese tradition once flowed through that country's videogames. Ishikawa Goemon was the Japanese Robin Hood, Old Nippon's 'Prince of Thieves'. Konami's reinterpretation of the legendary figure was not entirely true to life, with Goemon suddenly sprouting spiky blue hair and tackling his enemies either by hitting them with a large ornamental pipe, or else by throwing stolen coins at their heads until they simply died. Konami's games also featured giant robots, an obese ninja named Ebisumaru who liked to strip



ABOVE: Super Mario transformed into Tanooki Mario.

BELOW: Magikarp.

BOTTOM: A Drowsee; prime suspect in the attempted rape of a Russian Pokémon Go player.



NOTES

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Richard Freeman, *The Great Yokai Encyclopedia*, CFZ Press, 2010
NGamer Presents: *The History of Everything from Atlas to Zelda*, Future Publishing, 2010

off and hypnotise shop staff with his wobbly belly to gain discounts on goods and services, and bizarre plots involving time-travelling nuns, parodic mechanical versions of the *Street Fighter II* cast, and a nefarious alien plan to transform mediaeval Japan into a gigantic, never-ending stage-musical with the entire population as forced cast-members. Despite their evident brilliance, however, only five of the 25-plus games in the series ever earned a Western release. And therein lies the problem: the most clearly 'Japanese' of Japanese games didn't sell that well here even during the 1990s, when the words 'Japan' and 'videogames' were almost synonymous. Nineties gaming magazines, like the much-lamented *SuperPlay*, might have come with lovely hand-drawn manga-style covers by the artist Wil Overton and featured reviews of anime films at the back, but in the long term such associations were doomed. Gaming once provided a window into another culture, in some ways far different from our own, which seemed exciting, new, amusing, and often unbelievably bizarre – sometimes unacceptably

so, as in the deeply dubious genre of 'witch-touching' games which involved players prodding underage schoolgirls all over their bodies with their Nintendo DS stylus, with the precise nature of their pubescent squeals as you rubbed their sensitive zones indicating whether or not they were in league with Satan. From the 1980s to the mid-2000s, Japanese gaming ruled the world; but then, with the rise of Microsoft's X-Box and the changing economics of the industry, things changed, with the centre of development shifting to North America. Modern HD games cost so much to make compared to 2D 16-bit titles that they have to appeal worldwide to make any real profit, thus becoming ever more generic and 'safe', with first-person shooters increasingly predominating. Shooting strangers in the head can often be just as much fun on-screen as it is in real life, but personally I'd rather feed a *kappa* cucumbers any day. Even the titles of old Japanese games were more interesting than current bland fare; *Go! Go! Troublemakers!* or *Jesus: Dreadful Bio-Monster* would never get past marketing departments today. We're all Americans now; even in the virtual world. *Pokémon Go* may be published by Nintendo, but its actual developers are a company called Niantic... who are based in San Francisco. FT

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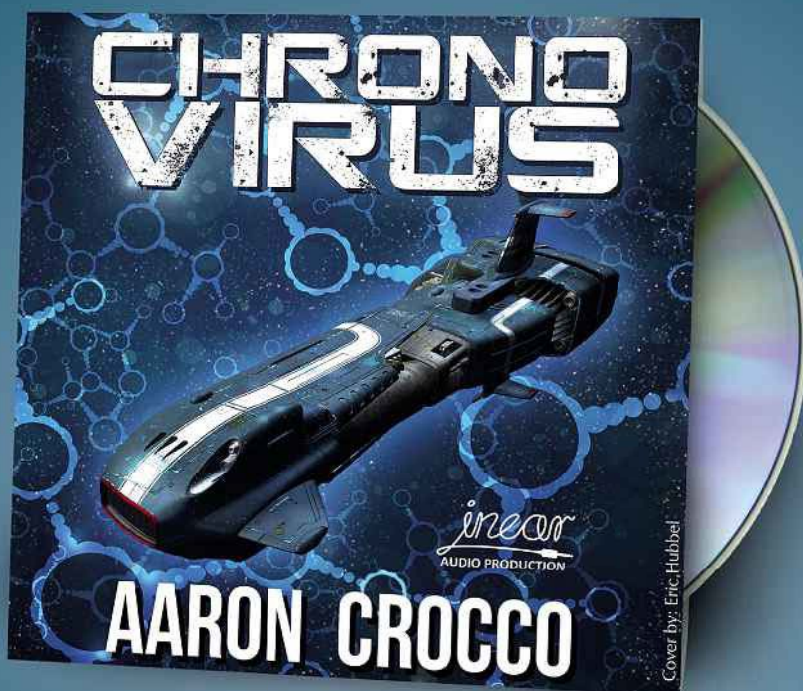
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This month's books, films and games

reviews



Holographic mind and death

Occasionally, an anomalous event or experience will crack open the doors of perception, allowing us a small hint of something a lot less mundane...



Opening the Doors of Perception

Anthony Peake

Watkins 2016

Pb, 267pp, refs, bib, ind., £10.99, ISBN 9781780289083

Anthony Peake is engaged in one of the most important strands of ontological inquiry of modern times, nothing less than unravelling the Gordian knot that is the mystery of our existence. In 2009, his study *Is there Life after Death?* explored what science can tell us about the process of dying and the more controversial evidence that physical death may not necessarily implicate the entity that comprises our persona. *The Dæmon* (2010) took an equally radical appraisal of our knowledge of the brain, that enigmatic interface between the body and the mind – the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ – worlds. Peake made a case for there being two distinct modes of consciousness, mirroring (but not necessarily confined to) the bicameral brain. An effect of this is that time is experienced differently in each aspect: one – he dubs the ‘Eidolon’ – is the familiar reactive part that deals with everyday life; the other – the ‘Dæmon’ – has aspects that might be called ‘unconscious’ and transcend mundane limitations.

Significantly, Peake argues, the Dæmon is the vector for out-of-the-body experiences (OBE), or of extra-temporal ‘memories’ such as of ESP, past lives, precognition etc. These

may mean nothing to the diehard materialist but often seem profound and even life-changing to those that experience them. Peake’s *The Out-of-Body Experience* (2011) and *The Labyrinth of Time* (2012) explore OBEs, Near-Death-Experiences (NDEs) and anomalous experiences of time. His conclusion – that our experience of time as a mentally-constructed illusion – is in line with the wisdom of ancient sages, but is here argued through reason and examples rather than through mystical revelation.

The entire argument is rehearsed and reinforced in Peake’s next two books – *The Infinite Mindfield* (2013) and *The Immortal Mind* (2014) written with fellow researcher Ervin Laszlo – collated with new evidence from the pharmaceutical, neurological and psychiatric sciences, and by comparing ‘normal’ and pathological conditions and experiences with those we call anomalous.

Time and again we return to the observation that some people have subjective experiences which transcend our familiar understanding of time and space – the sensation that, somehow, a part of us exists outside time and space. This is the theme of his latest report. Taking his cue from Aldous Huxley’s exploration of the nature of consciousness, Peake throws open ‘the doors of perception’ and invites us to take in the profound vista that is revealed to us.

He is not afraid of tackling some of the most profoundly entrenched ideas about the mind-brain interaction and, in reviewing the current literature on neuroscience and physics, he has found – and more importantly,

“Peake claims to have found hints that deserve serious research and investigation”

brought together and considered intelligently – interesting lines of inquiry. Peake claims to have found not evidence or proof, but rather signposts and hints that may turn out to be significant and therefore deserve serious research and investigation.

While physical materialism steadfastly confines that most mysterious and wonderful thing – consciousness – to the brain, the historical wealth of well-documented narrative experience (once fraud, delusion, misperception and misunderstanding are eliminated) would have us believe otherwise. Peake extrapolates several important strands of scientific research: that consciousness may be a distributed function (a biological equivalent of the computing technique), that the physical nature of ‘reality’ at the quantum level seems to have holographic aspects or behave like a hologram, and that the deeper inquiries are made into the building-blocks of the physical world the more the results (or effects) challenge our understanding of the nature of time and space.

The implication of a holographic model of the mind-brain function is very interesting. For me it resembles the Daoist depiction of the fundamental potential of our existence as

an Uncarved Block, pregnant with myriad forms awaiting revelation by the sculptor. While the block itself contains near infinite possibilities, the action of sculpting (our interaction with the world) whittles away the potentiality; in this it can be said to be ‘inhibiting’ that potentiality, confining or restricting it to a single ‘fixed’ form. However, the hypothetically ‘infinite’ potential of a newborn’s life does not follow a single linear path as, at each and every micro-moment, it faces a new universe of potential.

Thus, as in physicist Hugh Everett’s ‘many worlds’ theory, all of us are spinning off myriads of time-lines, the consequences of different choices or actions. In Peake’s model the function of our Eidolon (our person) is to navigate a single route along the branching timeline, this is our immediate experience of daily life. The Dæmon, however, is not a part of everyday awareness but that part of us, somehow ‘above’ (separate or Platonic ‘immortal’), that manages the many branching Eidolons on their many timelines. In this model, each of us can be seen as experiencing many variant lives (possibly simultaneously as sequentially has no meaning in this context); each necessarily unaware of the others, we presume, so that the full potential of ‘reality’ can be experienced in all its variations. Yet, on occasion, an anomalous event or experience will crack open our perceptual doors enough to hint at something far more wonderful than the mundane.

Consciousness, then, is not confined to the brain but is, potentially, everywhere, only

Continued on page 58

Pain and gain

Surgery sans pain relief was surprisingly successful, but what happened to *dwale*?



Crucial Interventions

An Illustrated Treatise on the Principles & Practice of Nineteenth-Century Surgery

Richard Barnett

Thames & Hudson 2015

Hb, 256pp, illus, ind, £19.95, ISBN 9780500518106

It's easy to forget just how barbaric surgery once was. *Crucial Interventions* brings the horror home with savage clarity. Early 19th century surgeons worked without anaesthetics or antisepsis. Patients were often drunk and needed to be held down. Robert Liston operated with a knife between his teeth and could amputate a leg in less than three minutes. Despite the speed, operations were terrible. For months after novelist Fanny Burney underwent a mastectomy without anaesthetics in 1811, she could be "disordered by a single question" about it. Nine months later, Burney wrote she had "a headache from going on with the account". She couldn't even read it over because the "recollection is still so painful". But she survived the procedure, dying in 1840.

Surgery changed almost beyond recognition practically, scientifically and socially during the 19th century. Anaesthetics arrived during the 1840s. Lister published his pioneering work into antisepsis in 1867. Surgeons developed innovative equipment. By the end of the century, surgery "was claimed as the outstanding achievement of imperial civilisation – and a justification of the global reach of the British Empire". Nevertheless, Barnett challenges many preconceived ideas about

pre-19th century surgery. Barber-surgeons didn't have modern analgesics or anaesthetics and the procedures were excruciating. But a 12th-century manuscript suggests *dwale* – a cocktail of wine, hemlock, opium, henbane, lettuce, pig's bile and vinegar – to induce sleep during surgery. Pharmacologically, it probably helped, and I wonder what other pearls of wisdom were lost in the intervening centuries.

And despite a lack of antiseptics and antibiotics, the prognosis wasn't as bleak as you might expect. A 17th-century German barber-surgeon reported that 95 per cent of the 200 patients he treated during one year survived. Of 400 operations performed by a London surgeon in the same century, 265 were cured, 62 improved and 53 died. About half suffered from venereal diseases, which surgeons treated at the time, injecting, for example, mercury into the urethra. But an 81 per cent success rate isn't bad.

The pictures, drawn from the Wellcome Collection, are always beautiful, often disturbing and sometimes chilling. They underscore the old adage in biology that you see more in a drawing than a photograph; the procedures are revealed in an almost terrifying 'high definition'. Barnett's narrative is eloquent, fascinating and insightful.

In the forward, surgeon Professor Roger Kneebone remarks "This book combines a gripping narrative with beautiful and often uncomfortable illustrations". When my fashion designer daughter Yasmin picked up the book, she commented "That's so gross... but really cool". Take your pick of Kneebone or Yasmin: either way, I couldn't have put it better myself.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

EITHER A CUT ABOVE OR ICKY, DEPENDING ON YOUR POINT OF VIEW

9

Continued from previous page

limited to the here and now by the brain. We have not one life, but potentially many, limited to the current one only by the immediacy of experiencing and surviving in the here and now. Our perception and experience of time and space could be unlimited, but is limited only by focus on our daily life. Mystics and shamans have told us this through the ages, and now Anthony Peake and his colleagues are beginning to quantify the process. This is crucial to fortune's understanding of the nature of perception and of 'normality', the better to judge what is 'anomalous'.

Boldly researched, detailed and with clear examples of experience anomalies, this highly commendable book underpins his non-magical model of immortality. Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

BOLDLY RESEARCHED AND WITH CLEAR EXAMPLES OF ANOMALIES

9

Nazi UFO Time Travelers

Do We Owe the Future To The Fuhrer?

Timothy Green Beckley, Sean Casteel, Tim R Swartz & Brian Allan

Global Communications 2016

Pb, 150pp, illus, \$18.00, ISBN 9781606112205



If you have never seen *Iron Sky*, a low-budget sci-fi comedy, I recommend you get hold of a copy.

The plot revolves around the idea that in 1945 Nazis escaped to the Moon in UFOs, and are now about to come back and conquer Earth. I particularly liked the scene in the United Nations, where the North Korean ambassador announces that all the UFOs that have been sighted originate in North Korea, and were designed by the Dear Leader. Everyone else in the room falls about laughing.

Sadly, there are no laughs in *Nazi UFO Time Travelers*, not even unintentional ones. The subtitle 'Do We Owe the Future To The Fuhrer?' is one of those questions to which you merely have to answer 'no' and you're quids in.

This is a well produced large-

format softback, reminiscent of some role-playing game rulebooks. None of the many pictures have source attributions, and few even have captions. Many are just fantasy artwork of a low standard. What value is a pencil sketch of a Nazi UFO over a Norwegian fjord based only on imagination? (Apart from filling a page, that is.)

The book is incoherent, repetitious and self-contradictory. We are told over and over again that the chief Nazi rocket scientist was Werner von Braun. Thank you, but once was enough. On one page the occupants of UFOs are grey aliens of the familiar sort, on another they are blonde Aryans with German accents. No argument is developed, and there is precious little about time travel. The final chapter is simply a rehash of an anonymous piece of fantasy fiction copied off some website. If the Nazis had developed time travel, they might have made better use of it, but any sort of intelligent critique is beyond the scope of this book.

Pretty much everything is speculation from rumour or unattributable anonymous sources. Evidence there is none. The authors show no critical ability to weed out well-known hoaxes. It will come as a surprise to many to learn that Adamski's famous UFO photo is in fact a Hannebu Class II Nazi saucer minus the insignia. (See also <http://discaircraft.greylfalcon.us/HAUNEBU.htm>).

What makes these tales of Nazi UFOs so unbelievable is that in the case of one experimental aircraft – the rocket-powered Messerschmitt Me 163 Komet – we do know a great deal about it, which suggests if any disc-like aircraft were ever developed by the Nazis during WWII, they would be equally well documented.

Which is where *Iron Sky* comes in – one could equally well write a sequel called *North Korean UFO Time Travelers: Do We Owe the Future To The Dear Leader?* with an equal absence of evidence for anything. But of course, North Koreans are not as bankable as the Nazis, with their sexy Hugo Boss uniforms.

This book is not totally useless, in that it could be used for source

material by someone looking to write a steam-punkish thriller, but frankly, one could get much the same information in an afternoon's poking around the Internet.

Roger Musson

Fortean Times Verdict

DISORGANISED SPECULATION ABOUT NAZI UFOS

2

The Age of Em

Work, Love and Life When Robots Rule The Earth

Robin Hanson

Oxford University Press 2016

Hb, 448pp, £20.00, ISBN 9780198754626



This book is unbelievable, and not in a good way. *The Age of Em* explores what might happen when human brains can be emulated with computer software, creating digital copies of people in a virtual world.

The difficulty of creating artificial intelligence from scratch has promoted research into copying brain functions into computer hardware without necessarily understanding them. This should eventually lead to whole brain emulations (or 'ems'), but what happens after that is pure speculation.

That someone might be copied thousands of times, that a dead person might be recreated from a backup copy, that virtual people could be accelerated to experience life thousands of times faster than those in the real world, are interesting (if unoriginal) movie scenarios.

Economists are often divorced from reality, but Hanson seems barely to have flirted with it. "I expect at least 30% of future situations to be usefully informed by my analysis" is a bold claim, especially when his section on religion concludes that "most of the major religions of today... have peacefully accommodated almost all of the vast changes that have appeared since those religions began." Hanson expects all religion to "comfortably adapt" to the em world. Just as they have comfortably adapted today?

Hanson has paid for his body to be cryogenically preserved

after death, hoping for a digital copy of his brain to be uploaded one day. Many of his assumptions are based on the idea that nobody minds dying if they can be copied. I do not think there will be many takers among non-economists.

Under 'sexuality', Hanson suggests that ems might like to castrate themselves because historically eunuchs have been better at multi-tasking. In the real world, self-castration has been surprisingly unpopular given its obvious economic benefits. Ems might prefer endless hyperreal digital sex, uneconomic as it is.

Hanson suggests that preventing intellectual property crime and 'mind theft' (unauthorised copying of ems), will require complete access to every computer. Also, to check there are no hidden computers, authorities will impose complete surveillance of the entire planet and "and also hundreds of metres underneath it." At present, the authorities cannot see inside a smartphone without the password, never mind find computers in tax havens.

Hanson acknowledges that the rapid pace of life in the em world means that ems would be replaced by more advanced artificial intelligences in a year or two. So his predictions are only intended to represent a wafer-thin slice of time.

The Age of Ems does not deal well with issues like social justice, capitalism versus socialism, the developing world, or global ecology. Hanson is mainly concerned with economics, even looking at 'retirement strategies' for ems; at least he doesn't calculate how many can dance on the head of a pin.

Darker stories are left largely untouched by Hanson's econo-techno-optimism: digital slavery, virtual torture, computer-aided totalitarianism and greed unchecked by existing laws all seem to be all too likely in em world.

Whatever reality has in store, it will be weirder – yet more familiar – than this dry economic speculation.

David Hambling

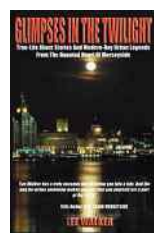
Fortean Times Verdict

ECONOMIC SPECULATION FAILS TO ENGAGE WITH POSSIBLE REALITY

3

Mersey tales

Liverpool and Merseyside voices come to life in this collection of urban legends



Glimpses in the Twilight

True-Life Ghost Stories and Modern-Day Urban Legends from the Haunted Heart Of Merseyside

Lee Walker

Fortean Words 2015

Pb, 324pp, illus, notes, £12.99, ISBN 9781909488342

Liverpool has its fair share of tales of matters supernatural and extraordinary events. Given the number of works that document true life supernatural experiences familiar to forterans (Silent Watchers, UFOs, death-predicting hounds...), one wonders how Walker can give these and similar tropes an engaging twist. Hasn't Merseyside's 'bard of the bizarre' Tom Slemen covered them in his regular digests for the local press?

Walker brings a breath of fresh air to the eyewitness and 'friend of a friend' narrative. He offers an insight not only into the specific event but also into the personalities of speakers and their community. He presents a formidable amount of social and historical background, and – when necessary – folkloric material. By presenting his material verbatim (and with many digressions voiced in vernacular Scouse), he encourages an empathy with the characters telling their tales, even though the stories themselves – and I cite 'Spring-heel Jack' and 'The Sinking of the Lusitania' – may be very old ground.

Walker also includes elements of his own "encounters" into the framing narratives, and his biographical material will resonate with anyone whose

entrée into the world of the weird and wonderful was in adolescence. His desire to place Liverpool and Merseyside in the premier league of paranormal encounters is demonstrated with energy and enthusiasm. He treats his subjects with a humorous distance and foregrounds the tales with success. I found the liminal and urban landscapes of the tales – 'The Day the Black Sun Came' and 'Baleful Echoes from the Blighted-Winter Earth' – particularly effective, capturing a Nigel Kneale(esque) otherness to great effect.

Being from Liverpool myself, I found specific locations and places took on, perhaps, a more embodied form, but the amount of detailed description Walker proffers would allow any reader to feel fully immersed in any of his tales. All to the good, as throughout the book an arching narrative emerges that addresses the author as a subject within the book and his personal responses to defining moments of Liverpool's recent history – he mentions his sense of loss over the death of John Peel and James Herbert, for example, and – more whimsically – his own rock'n'roll lifestyle with his band The Lids. However, it is in his emotionally wrought description of the commemoration of the Hillsborough dead that we see the integrity of Walker as a writer engaged with both his city and its storytellers.

As an anthology of weird and wonderful encounters *Glimpses* certainly holds its own. As a piece of incidental biography, most certainly. But as a pæan to Liverpool – a city larger than life and replete with its own people-next-door myth makers – most definitely.

Christopher Hill

Fortean Times Verdict

ENJOYABLE AND LIVELY – EVEN FOR NON-SCOUSE FORTERANS

8

Subaquatic curios

Russia has had tales of submersible objects for centuries, but reports of USOs have intensified in the last 100 years



Russia's USO Secrets

Unidentified Submersible Objects in Russian and International Waters

Paul Stonehill & Philip Mantle

Richard Dolan Press 2016

Pb, 186pp, ind, £13.77, ISBN 9781532898402

We live on an ocean planet, so it is not surprising that UFOs are seen over or in the vicinity of the great expanses of water that surround us. Certainly it would make sense that alien visitors would want to explore them, and some ufologists believe that they have built underwater bases.

Stonewall and Mantle show that USOs are not a new phenomenon. For example, in AD 1065, in ancient Ukraine, a star was regularly seen after sunset in the west, projecting blood-red rays. In the same period fisherman rescued a terrifying-looking child from their nets. It was so frightening in appearance that they threw it back in the river Setoml, and the sun subsequently dimmed.

Later, on 15 August 1663, a great noise was heard over the Robozero Lake, 50 km (30 miles) southwest of Belozersk, followed by a huge 40m (130ft) diameter flaming sphere that sent two beams of light into the lake. The sighting could have been due to a meteor or ball lightning, but an expedition led by Candidate of Science E Gorshkove in 1982 found evidence that something had discharged high levels of energy in the area where this was seen.

Nearer our own time, on 9 August 1845, the commander

of the *Agamemnon* brig whilst sailing in the Baltic Sea near Bornholm Island, saw a 'powerful flame bursting out from the water with numerous sparkles'. One explanation was that this was caused by an underwater volcano, but Admiral Mikhail Petrovich Lazarev thought it was linked to a sighting of a meteor on 13 August near Dagerort Lighthouse, hurricanes and northern lights seen in Stockholm. Ufologists have also lumped these phenomena together to conclude that UFO craft crashed into the Baltic Sea during the summer of 1845.

In our modern era, many sightings of UFOs have been made over or near Russian waters. These sightings drew the attention of the USSR Navy, no doubt due to the possibility that they were enemy craft. Yet, some high-ranking officers believed that they were of an extraterrestrial origin. For example, Major-General V. Demyanenko, commander of the Russian Military Diver Service, alleged that during exercises in Lake Baikal during 1982 his frogmen had seen a group of underwater swimmers. These swimmers were 3m (10ft) tall humanoids, who only wore tight-fitting silvery suits and sphere-like helmets. They were at a depth of 50m (164ft) in freezing water. Therefore, it was impossible they were of a human origin.

A team of seven divers was assembled to investigate the matter, and they were able to capture one of the swimmers in a net. Unfortunately, a powerful force threw the divers to the surface and the creature got away. Even worse, the rapid decompression they experienced caused three of the men to die and the rest to become disabled. As a consequence, the USSR Ministry of Defence produced a bulletin listing sightings of similar creatures, light

phenomena seen emanating from the depths and reports of giant spheres and discs visiting lakes, with the intent of warning against making any 'unnecessary encounters'.

That is certainly one of the best 'one that got away' stories and makes us wonder if it is any more literally true than the story of the terrifying child thrown back into the river by those frightened fishermen.

Navy personnel also reported USOs moving too fast, deep and irregular to be conventional craft in the area of the Bermuda Triangle. Similar sonar contacts also troubled the Russian nuclear submarines of the Northern Fleet. To satisfy the KGB, which always wanted 'explanations', these detections were explained as marine life.

On 2 August 1965, there was no ambiguity about the origin of the USO spotted by the crew of the steamship *Raduga*. They saw a 60m (200ft) diameter sphere blast out of the water and hover 150m (430ft) above the Red Sea. Some local fishermen in a motorboat were much closer to the object, and it caused so much turbulence in the water that one of them was drowned. A few months later three of the fishermen died, which might have been due to their exposure to the USO.

These intriguing reports are divided by region, and for better clarity it would have been handy to have included a few more maps of the sighting locations and a chronological listing of the types of sightings. I would also have liked a bit more analysis of the reports, but these are minor quibbles as it does meet the authors' goal of providing us with an impressive review of the evidence for Russian USOs.

Nigel Watson

Fortean Times Verdict

USO HAVE MADE A SPLASH IN RUSSIA FOR CENTURIES

8

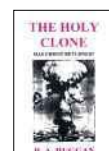
The Holy Clone

Has Christ Returned?

RA Duggan

RAD/Fast-Print Publishing 2014

Pb, 203pp, illus, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781784561253



A genuine oddity, this; a cross between a post-English Civil War millenarian Ranter's chapbook and a 1970s punk

fanzine.

The common denominator is self-published, uncensored Apocalypse, and the author – an art tutor and artist of some accomplishment – appears to have undergone his own personal Revelation during a period of Bible study with the popular charismatic Christian Alpha Course.

Predictably, the Book of Revelation features extensively throughout, its prophecies linked to Hitler, the Holocaust and the atom bomb.

But the author's USP is his argument – backed up by Zechariah Sitchin, scriptural quotes and his own striking Xerox-ed artwork – that biblical prophecies of Christ's return and of the Last Judgement have already come to pass, and that Christ is already here on Earth at the time of writing.

The potentially distressing nature of this book's claims are offset by the author's powerful art, reproduced throughout. 'Readymade' sculptures and installations, doctored photographs and collages, many of them self-portraits, accompanied by biblical quotations and references – but with unexpected humour and irreverence.

Highly original, and possibly the only book connecting Millwall Football Club with the Book of Revelation, or to suggest that "the South London area of Lewisham [is] a likely location for the Second Coming of Christ."

As to the exact identity of the newly-incarnated Christ-individual, readers will have to buy the book to find out.

Chris Josiffe

Fortean Times Verdict

A MAGICAL AND FASCINATING BOOK

6

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a selection of recent fortean books...

Black Dog Traditions of England

Ian Humberstone & David Chatton Barker

Folklore Tapes (www.folkloretapes.co.uk) 2016

LP, DVD, 80pp book, posters, £58.00

Ian Humberstone and David Chatton Barker aim to revitalise general interest in regional folklore by combining archival research with fieldwork at the locations of hauntings, legends and fortean incidents.

The topic of this 'reliquary' is the Black Dog, a large, black, spectral hound with huge and sometimes flaming eyes. The legends are often associated with witches or demons, and they go by different local names. The collection comprises a DVD and an audio tape, a 16mm 'art' film, posters and photography. Also included is an illustrated booklet presenting local narratives and references. (Curiously, there is no mention of the works of either Janet Bord or Norfolk folklorist Ivan Bunn.)

Previous issues have focused upon the Pendle Witches, the folklore of Devon and Lancashire, the stone circles of Iona, tunnels and other underground infrastructures; they also put out a bimonthly recorded 'newsletter'.

Real Visitors

Voices from Beyond

Brad Steiger & Sherry Hansen Steiger

Visible Ink 2016

Pb, 432pp, illus, bib, ind, \$16.95, ISBN 9781578595419

This is the ninth encyclopaedic anthology on the paranormal the Steigers have put together for Visible Ink. This one is loosely themed around encounters with unearthly entities – ghosts, spirits, demons, gods, and elementals – by shamans, mediums and others, some summoned and some quite unexpected. Gathered here is lore on different types of entities, their habitats, energy types and domains.

The Steigers never stray too far from their central tenet: the aliens associated today with UFOs are a modern manifestation of spiritual and psychical phenomena that have been recorded since ancient times – though over time and between cultures the underlying entities and forces have been perceived according to the local culture.

Given the breadth of their coverage, it is pretty scattershot with little account given to the citation of adjacent cases when they come from different times and peoples. It is, nevertheless, worthwhile, as many of the examples are unfamiliar and the Steigers

excel at interviewing researchers or practitioners of culture-specific magic and lore; for example, Muslim scholars on nature of djinn, or the spirit-healing shamans of South America.

How to Talk to an Alien

Nancy du Terre

New Page Books 2016

Pb, 186pp, bib, ind, \$15.99, ISBN 9781632650214

Self-professed psychic detective, remote viewer and media star Du Terre is full of questions: Can aliens speak English? With an accent? Can they read minds? Do they have DNA? You get the drift... She is convinced UFOs (whatever they are) are full of "pilots, crew and passengers", so they must communicate, right? Her entire book is based on this totally presumptuous idea which is based upon other presumptuous ideas – that and how everyone these days is getting channelling messages from visitors from other worlds (including the Otherworld). Aliens ring her up on the phone to explain and she is happy to chat for hours about all this.

The real mystery is why veteran ufologist and nuclear scientist Stanton Friedman wrote the introduction.

[This review ends there as our reviewer left muttering something about losing the will to live.]

Prisoners, Lovers & Spies

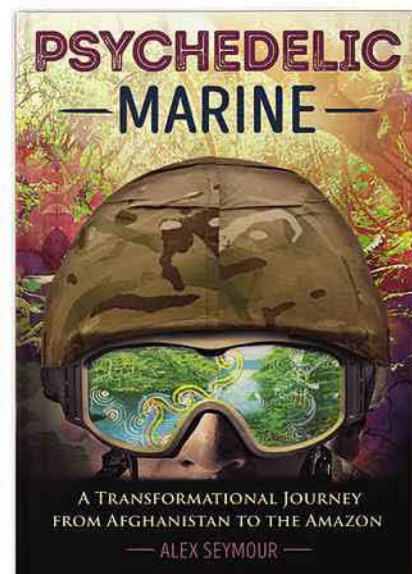
Kristie Macrakis

Yale University Press 2014

Hb, 377pp, illus, notes, ind, \$27.50, ISBN 97803000179255

Mackrakis – a professor of history and technology at Georgia Tech – presents a fascinating history of secret writing, from the simple codes and 'invisible' inks used by lovers and spies in earlier times to the complex modern world of digitally disguising or hiding images and messages for transmission electronically or over the Internet. The American Revolutionary War and World Wars get chapters, as do the efforts of spy catchers, stage magicians and terrorists.

The last chapter could be the most disturbing, given the fascination with high-level, occult or murderous conspiracies and their need to keep communications 'hidden'; someone has to sort out the real and imagined when codes are reported to be concealed in porn sites or commercial companies surreptitiously resort to subliminal advertising.



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Hunt for the Wilderpeople

Dir Taika Waititi, New Zealand 2016
On UK release from 16 September

I hadn't come across New Zealand director Taika Waititi before catching the wonderful low-budget mockumentary *What We Do in the Shadows*, which he co-wrote, co-directed and co-starred in with his old comedy troupe chum Jemaine Clement, of *Flight of the Conchords* fame. This fly-on-the-wall look at a contemporary Wellington house-share in which all the tenants are vampires was one of the unexpected gems of 2014 – smart, inventive, laugh-out-loud funny, and curiously charming despite the copious bloodletting involved.

Waititi's latest film, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, seemed a rather different proposition – a family-friendly film based on a popular Kiwi novel by Barry Crump – but Waititi takes an essentially formulaic odd-couple story and injects it with the off-kilter characterisation and storytelling quirks that made *Shadows* work so well.

Ricky (Julian Dennison) is a problem child from the city – fat, foul-mouthed, and “a very bad egg” according to the batshit crazy child services worker who drops him off at the remote rural home of his new foster parents, Aunt

Bella (Rima Te Wiata) and Uncle Hec (Sam Neill). In fact, once Ricky comes out of his shell, he's a bit of a sweetie, adapting to country life, amusing the crusty Hec with obscene haikus (“Kings you wanker”) and gradually responding to the warmth of the eccentric Bella. When this idyll goes tits-up and the boy is threatened with being rehomed, Ricky and Hec (along with Tupac the dog) go on the run and find themselves having to survive deep in the New Zealand bush as the authorities mount a full-scale manhunt.

The comedic chemistry between Neill (who has never been better) and Dennison is a delight throughout, and Waititi surrounds them with a cast of equally oddball characters (including his own hilarious turn as a minister) that somehow remain emotionally grounded. It's very funny, and full of heart, even if it does go slightly off the boil on the home stretch. It's going to be fascinating to see what this unique director brings to his next project, Marvel's epic *Thor: Ragnarok*, currently shooting, but meanwhile, don't miss this lovely film.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

HEARTWARMING ODDBALL
ADVENTURE: RECOMMENDED

8

Under the Shadow

Dir Babak Anvari, Iran/Jordan/Qatar/UK 2016

On UK release from 30 September

Set in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq conflict, *Under the Shadow* concerns young mum Shideh (Narges Rashidi), who is home alone with daughter Dorsa (the super-cute Avin Manshadi) while her doctor husband Iraj (Bobby Naderi) is away serving in the military. With Tehran threatened by regular air raids Iraj wants his family to leave the city and stay with relatives in the north, but the fiercely independent Shideh has dug her heels in.

When a missile strikes the roof of their apartment block but fails to detonate, mother and daughter are left living on their nerves. Dorsa develops a fever, begins to have vivid nightmares and loses her favourite doll. Worse still, she has been spooked by the little boy downstairs who has warned her of approaching djinn, evil spirits of folklore which travel on the winds, drawn to fear, anxiety and disharmony.

It is typical of the multiple layers on which the film works that its title could be taken to refer variously to Iranians living in a war zone, Iranians living in a strict religious society, Iranian women living in a strict religious

society which requires them to remain covered while in public, or women living in a male-dominated society. Shideh, of course, falls into each one of these categories.

She has a relatively liberal lifestyle, behind her own front door at least. She does her Jane Fonda workout every morning, wears Western clothes, and watches videotapes. However, at the beginning of the film, she is attending an interview at her old university; a medical student at the time of the revolution, she dropped out to get more involved in radical politics and now, some years down the line, she is hoping to get her place back. However, it is made crystal clear to her that this is absolutely out of the question, now and forever. “Every mistake,” she is told by the (male) administrator, “has consequences.” A frustrating situation is made worse by the fact that her husband, whom she met on the course, is now a doctor; during a row he reminds her how she berated him for being so timid as to continue with his studies while she was trying to change the world.

Very early on, then, Shideh's judgment is called into question by two male characters; and this is important because, without wanting to give too much away, *Under the Shadow* is one of those films where it is left to the viewer to decide whether the threat is real or imagined. In a strictly ‘entertainment’ sense of course, it's immaterial: director Anvari has to generate and sustain the atmosphere either way, and he does so with real skill.

But in planting the seed of doubt, he is subtly promoting one of his film's themes: that of how a woman living under such conditions might attempt to define a role for herself. Denied any real responsibility or personal freedom, does Shideh conjure, if you'll pardon the expression, a situation whereby she and her daughter are in grave danger and she must assume a dominant role? Good, meaty stuff, then, and a significant departure from many contemporary horror films that are content to merely scare us; assuming they can even manage that.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

BEST IRANIAN FEMINIST
HORROR FILM OF THE YEAR

8

The Girl with all the Gifts

Dir Colm McCarthy, UK/US 2016
On UK release from 23 September

Locked in an isolation cell, Melanie (Sennia Nanua) hides a picture of a kitten under her mattress before soldiers come and strap her to a wheelchair. She certainly seems to be sugar and spice and all things nice, but then she is taken to join row after row of children similarly restrained in wheelchairs in a windowless classroom. It's a sinister image that creates a real sense of unease at the beginning of *The Girl With All the Gifts*, and one that bodes well for a film riffing on otherwise familiar zombie tropes: perhaps there will be something new here.

When the class is joined by the kindly Helen (Gemma Arterton) the silent bond between teacher and her star pupil Melanie, the titular 'girl with all the gifts', is clear. A touching scene is brutally interrupted by Paddy Considine's Sgt Eddie Parks, who reminds Helen – and the audience – exactly what we are dealing with here. A slurp of saliva on a bare arm is proffered to a child and suddenly the kids are all baring their teeth, jaws snapping reflexively like those of cats transfixed by a sparrow outside a window.

While the world outside is overrun with zombies of the mindlessly ravenous kind, these 'Hungries', although afflicted by the same fungal infection responsible for the demise of most of the human race, retain their normal faculties until exposed to the unmasked scent of human flesh.

Dr Caroline Caldwell (Glenn Close, slumming it in fatigues and a symbolically harsh buzz-cut) is ruthlessly single-minded in her experimentation upon the children in the hope of finding a cure. This puts her at odds with Helen (so nice she'd take the tea-and-sandwiches approach with ISIS). But before Dr Caldwell can get Melanie on the dissecting table and dig around inside her for an answer, the facility is overrun by the infected and everyone has to flee and fight to stay alive outside.

Directed by Colm McCarthy (whose credits include episodes of *Peaky Blinders*, *Ripper Street*, *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*) and

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth **REVEREND PETER LAWS** dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

NIGHT GALLERY: THE COMPLETE SERIES

Created by Rod Serling, US 1969-73
Fabulous Films, £49.99 (DVD)

Perhaps Rod Serling's name will always be tethered to his breakout TV show *The Twilight Zone*, and fair enough too. After all, the series contained some of TV's finest sci-fi moments. Yet when you talk to horror fans (and interestingly many horror writers and directors) you'll notice they just as often link Serling with his lesser known short story series from the Seventies: *Night Gallery*. Each episode opens with Serling in his signature suit, strolling through a collection of intense paintings that tease out the stories to be told. And what brilliantly morbid paintings they are! (It should be noted that recreations of these works are to be found on eBay if you're a hardcore *Gallery* fan.)

Unlike the half-hour *Twilight Zone*, *Night Gallery* aired for an hour and so crammed in anything from one to four stories in each episode. Now that the aptly named Fabulous Films have released every single one as a 10-disc set, it's like stumbling over a mahoosive collection of 1970s anthology movies that you never got the chance to see

on original release.

The sheer quantity of stories means that quality is crazily inconsistent. Serling himself was reputedly less than impressed with many of them. The frequent super-short sketches are particularly dire. An example would be one on which a posh guy in a cape turns up at a blood bank not to make a deposit – but a withdrawal! Cue flashing Dracula teeth and comedy kettle drum. Haw haw haw! These comedy moments are often the very definition of the facepalm. And yes, some of the serious stories are pretty mediocre too. Yet there are enough genuine gems in here to warrant buying the entire box set and firing through it like an intrepid explorer of the televisual macabre.

There are definite scares to be had. "The House" or the simple and absurd "Green Fingers", for example, really creeped me out. But Serling is at his most profound when he's tugging at your heart strings as well as your nerves. Stories like "They're Tearing Down Tim Reilly's Bar" or "The Messiah on Mott Street" had me wiping away sentimental tears. Even his adaptation of HP Lovecraft's "Cool Air" adds something that the original author skipped past: emotional,



romantic loss. But Serling wasn't the only writer who hit gold here. Many of the segments are based on short stories, like a stunning entry from Season Two narrated by Orson Welles. "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" is so innovative in its theme and execution that it helps you realise that the *Night Gallery*, in the end, is like all galleries: storehouses for more than a few duds, but also home to plenty of *bona fide* masterpieces.

Fortean Times Verdict

A COLLECTION OF SEVENTIES TV TREASURES FROM ROD SERLING

8



adapted by MR Carey from his own highly-regarded post-apocalyptic novel of the same name, *The Girl with All the Gifts* hinges upon the tension generated by the question it poses: exactly who are the monsters here? For while the adults make conscious choices in pursuit of their own survival, the children are essentially victims of their uncontrollable instincts. This tension is played out across a London of decaying tenements and concrete estates which nature has clearly been in the process of reclaiming for a very long time: the creepers reach all the way to the tops of the tower blocks.

Not having read Carey's original source material I cannot compare the way the book handles the antecedent tropes a story like this can't help but play upon; but in this film adaptation they are often glaringly clear, be it conflict between the military and scientists, as in *Day of the Dead*; rampaging 'London zombies', as in *28 Days Later*; the last stand for a human cure, as in *I Am Legend*, or the sort of routine foraging in abandoned shops that leads to immediate peril, as in *The Walking Dead*. Threatened by a pack of infected feral children, Melanie becomes the uninfected humans' only hope of survival in more ways than one. Sennia Nanua, like certain other young performers, brings to the role a sort of rapt focus that provides the fulcrum for the drama and holds much of the film together. There is a nifty reversal in fortunes at the conclusion, which leads you to consider that whatever existence is, it remains in the eye of the beholder; and that nature doesn't really give a stuff one way or the other.

For all that, I was left with the feeling that any deeper philosophical musings and resonance were somewhat lost in the transference from page to screen; and that sense of deep unease I felt at the outset was effectively replaced by a lot of walking, running and shooting for the film's duration. Although light on outright gore, there is more than enough tension and conflict (including all that walking and running and shooting) to make this an effective excursion for zombie lovers.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict

FUNGAL ZOMBIES LIVE UP A POST-APOCALYPSE LONDON

7

Blair Witch

Dir Adam Wingard, US 2016

On UK release from 12 September

So it's back to the Maryland woods in this direct sequel to the 1999 horror found-footage classic *The Blair Witch Project* (let's not mention the disastrous *Book of Shadows*, released the following year, before the directors gave up on it and devolved their franchise mainly into what the industry call 'ancillaries'). *The Blair Witch Project* remains one of the most successful independent films of all time and there's always been the notion that it's a prime candidate for a reboot, especially since technology has moved on since 1999 and the various forms of possible 'found footage' are now vastly more elaborate. Director Adam Wingard (*The Guest*, *A Horrible Way to Die*) has cheerfully borrowed from the numerous ghost and paranormal shows that infest US cable TV, for example, the use of drones in Jack Osbourne's *Haunted Highway*. But the truth is that new technology means better detail and less room for the imagination to roam.

The new storyline? We follow Jack (*The Walking Dead*'s James Allen McCune) in search of his sister Heather, lost on the previous expedition, after an Internet site posts apparently new found footage that seems to show she may still be alive. After much coaxing of the website owners, nervy and possibly deceitful backwoods goths to a man and woman, they mount a joint expedition to locate the house where the witch and the sister might be found.

There's plenty of atmosphere, plenty of jumps, feints and misdirections, with unpleasant moments dropping on the storyline like ticks from the trees. The denouement is ferociously loud and dynamic after the silence of the woods, and the set design of the witch's house impressively decayed, seemingly drawing on films such as *REC*. It is objectively much better directed than the original, but what it makes up for in modernity and professionalism it also loses in amateurish poetry. Favourite line? "Yeah I *faked* it because it's *real*". Few things sum up the modern age quite so tartly.

Roger Clarke

Fortean Times Verdict

THE SEMINAL SHAKY-CAM SCARE-FEST GETS A REBOOT

7

SHORTS

THAT COLD DAY IN THE PARK

Eureka, £14.99 (Dual format)



A wealthy young spinster who has "Never experienced a man!" (shouted the poster) spots a guy out her window, sitting in the rain. She invites him in to dry off, then quickly decides his stay should be permanent. Sandy Dennis shines (and horrifies) as the love-hungry lead. Props to an actress who can

balance awkwardness, melancholy and frightening psychosis in pretty much every scene. Put it this way: I cared enough to involuntarily call out "Don't!" when I realised what she was about to do. She drives the plot, so it's no shock when it takes a turn for the weird. Think of it as a mash-up of Polanski's *Repulsion* and King's *Misery*, but know that as a story of a sad psycho-lady looking for company, it stands firmly on its own creepy heels. **PL 8/10**

THE CHILDREN OF GREEN KNOWE

Simply Media, £19.99 (DVD)



A young boy, Toseland (Tolly) Oldknow (Alec Christie) goes to spend Christmas with his great-grandmother in her ancient home. Generations of the family have grown up there, and Tolly gradually encounters three children from the time of Charles II. Tolly's granny tells him stories about

past children in the family as if they're all still alive, and as if she personally knew them all, even those from the 17th century. As he begins to hear the previous children playing, then catches glimpses of them, the story blurs the boundaries between play and fantasy and dream and myth and story and reality. It takes a little while to get into; it feels dated from the start, partly because it's set in the 1950s (though it feels more like the 1930s) but partly because in style it seems much older than 1986 when it was broadcast. Adapted from the 1954 novel by Lucy M Boston, this BBC production is a gentle and very old-fashioned story, though none the worse for that. **David V Barrett 7/10**

KNIGHT OF CUPS

Studiocanal, £15.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

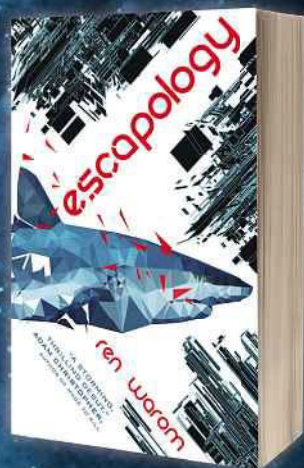


Oh for the days when the busy Terrence Malick only managed about one movie a decade! Starting with one of Vaughan Williams's *Pilgrim's Progress* settings – John Geilgud intoning Bunyan's words over music that would eventually become the luminous Fifth Symphony – it's clear that his latest film is

about a spiritual journey of some kind. Trouble is, the journey is that of a sulky-looking Christian Bale, having some sort of mid-life crisis while he continues to move through the successful Hollywood milieu in which he appears to work (at what, I wasn't sure; all he ever does is go to decadent parties, or the beach, where he broods and has sex with a series of drop-dead gorgeous young women; tough job, but someone's got to do it, right?) This determinedly oneiric film is structured around a Tarot reading – an attempt by the protagonist to find meaning in his empty life – contains the greatest number of symbolic images of water ever seen in a movie, and is densely allusive – Eliot, and Pasolini, as well as Bunyan and the Bible – but to patchily impressive effect. Every shot strains for significance, teeters on the brink of revelation – before we remember that we don't actually care about Bale's first-world problems enough for any of it to matter. One applauds the ambition of creating a spiritual cinema, but while Malick does Vanity Fair well enough, he can't reach the Celestial City. **DS 5/10**

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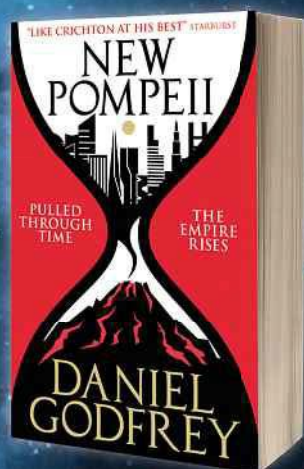
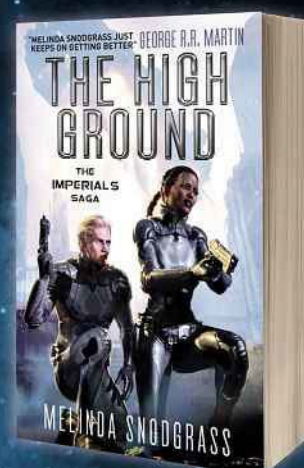
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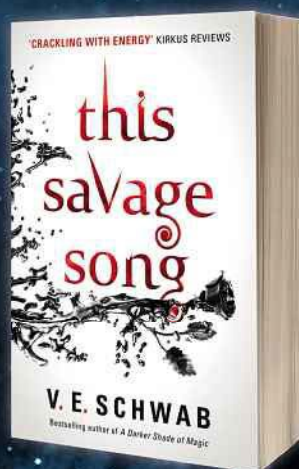
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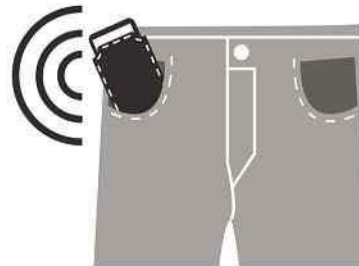


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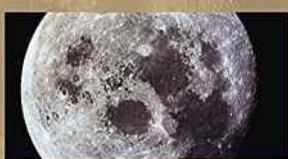
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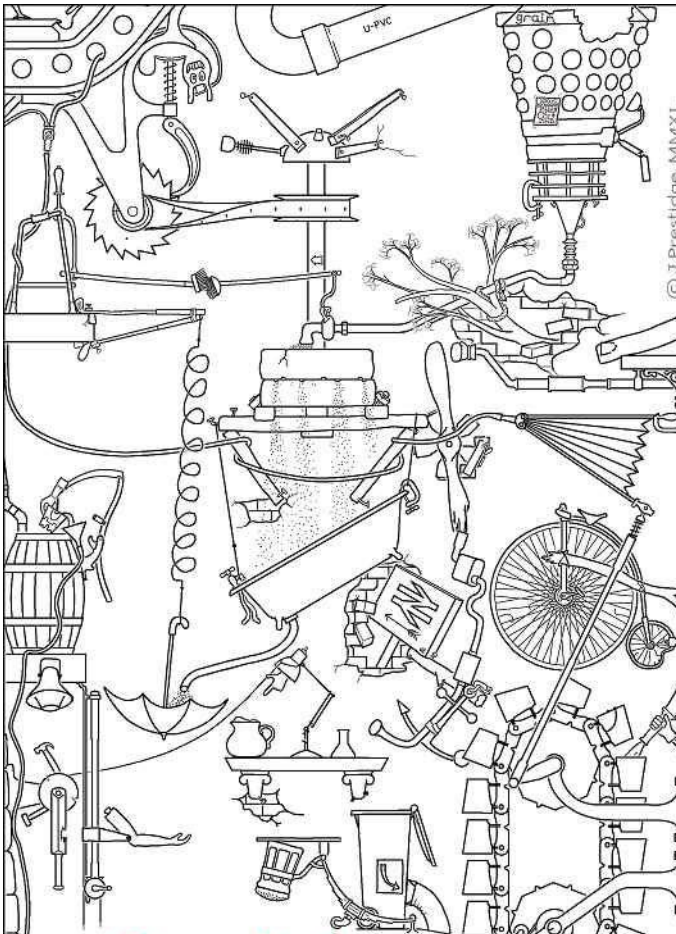
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Dear FT...

letters



Bigfoot lowdown

I work for Hilton Grand Vacations. Recently, I spoke with a guest – we'll call her Mary – from Yakima, Washington. Jokingly, I asked her if she had ever seen a Bigfoot. She replied that she knew the man who wore the gorilla suit in the movie they made way back when. "What movie was that?" I asked. "The one where the Bigfoot is walking through the woods in California". "What was his name?" "Heironimus. Bob Heironimus. He was my neighbour." So there you have it – the truth is out and Hilton guests do not lie!

Now that we are sharing our world with interdimensional entities, we should at least learn how to communicate with them. In his book *Silent Invasion: The Pennsylvania UFO-Bigfoot Casebook*, Stan Gordon cites an encounter between a woman and a Bigfoot she surprised in her backyard. The woman said "the big hairy ape" was extending its arms over its head – she thought it was going to attack her, so she shot it. The hairy biped disappeared in a bright flash of light. Recently a witness reported on a website how he communicates with Bigfoots who gather to "party behind his house on a full Moon". The witness claims that when Bigfoots hold their arms up over their heads it is a form of welcome or greeting. Maybe hunters, hikers and campers should keep this in mind in case they encounter one.

• 'Blow Me!' [FT342:9] reported that two pilot whales were killed when they choked to death trying to eat a fish that became trapped in their blowholes. This cause of death is mistaken since the oesophagus of a cetacean is not connected to its breathing passages and blowhole. This makes the incidents all the more bizarre since the fish must have swum directly into the whales' blowholes. Humans often choke on food and liquids when we say it "went down the wrong pipe", but it is impossible for a cetacean to choke like this.

Greg May
 Orlando, Florida



Simulacra corner

Stuart Lloyd noticed this simulacrum of a horse's head (or is it a duck's head?) among the roots of an ancient yew tree in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sievek@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

Cut'n paste astrology

Your obituary of the pop astrologer Jonathan Cainer [FT343:24] reminded me of the regrettable goings-on that followed the sudden death of Tina Kaye, one of his predecessors on the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* in the 1980s. Tina, whose hat and coat appeared to be made of the skins of turquoise budgerigars, failed to predict her own demise and left the newspapers without a horoscope column until a new soothsayer could be found.

In desperation, the *Sunday Express* editor, the great Sir John Junor, told his sub-editors to cobble one together every week for the emergency. I was one of them and am ashamed to say we carried out our instructions with a deplorable lack of gravity that may have had something to do with an equally deplorable excess of beer. If time was short we just raided the back columns from a decade or more earlier, jumbling up the predictions with scissors and paste to give them engaging new twists.

Often, however, imagination took wing and truly bizarre guidance was offered. "Whatever you do," I warned one twelfth of the nation in a star-sign forecast, "do not step outside your door today." It was sobering but gratifying to get a letter from a reader a few weeks later: "I always check my horoscope and take care to do what it says, so I stayed in all day just in case. But my neighbour's son, who has the same star sign as me, went out on his motorbike and had a fatal accident. So hats off to the *Sunday Express*!"

Nick Guitard
 Poundstock, Cornwall

Just a hypothesis

A few errors in the otherwise interesting piece on *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail* [FT343:52-53]. I've never seen Saunière's name prefixed by a 'de' before and suspect it is indeed just Saunière. The (original) book as published by Jonathan Cape is called *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*; the US publisher changed the title to *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. Saunière died in 1917, not

1916. It makes little sense to point out that Liz Greene was (unlike Dan Brown) not 'sued' for her novel with similar themes, given (as the article rightly says) it was published before the work by Lincoln, Baigent and Leigh (although some of the *Chronicle* TV documentaries had been broadcast). De Sède's *Le Trésor Maudit de Rennes le Château* was published in 1968, not 1977, a date which fits more accurately with the correct point made that the book set Lincoln on his way on this theme.

I was amused to see the word 'hypothesis' used: on one of my many trips to Rennes le Château I met Henry Lincoln, who looked me in the eye and with a mischievous wink said the book was "a hypothesis, dear boy, a hypothesis".

Tom Heywood
 By email

Hand of Glory

Your readers may be interested to learn that a Hand of Glory [FT342:14] features prominently in the Fighting Fantasy paperback *Moonrunner*, number 48, published in 1992 and written by the aptly named Stephen Hand. In the adventure, which has a loosely Victorian feel, the player has to remove a wooden hand from a hanged felon and have it enchanted by a necromancer in order to provide protection from a later magical attack. The hand itself exudes an aura of sleep that affects the player and others throughout the book. It is specifically referred to as a Hand of Glory by the author. We also encounter a pair of untrustworthy Irish grave robbers, sinister vaudeville showmen and more than a few nods to Jack the Ripper, alongside more incongruous lifts from Fu Manchu, *The Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*, *Halloween* and er... *Predator*; hence the kind of Rastafarian / Medusa hybrid on the front cover. Slightly uneven in tone, the game book does have a few nice set pieces, not least the Hand's enchantment, which I will not spoil further.

Ryan Shirlow
 Leeds, West Yorkshire

Spooky telly

I much enjoyed Stu Neville's take on TV ghost-hunting shows [FT342:54-55], which brought back a memory from (I think) late 1995. I attended quite a few fantasy/horror conventions at that period, and got to know Doncaster author Simon Clark. Over a few drinks in a hotel bar, he set out a brilliant idea he had conceived for a new kind of TV series – each week a team of dedicated ghost-hunters (led by himself) would visit a notoriously “haunted” location, discuss the history and traditions of any manifestations and spend the night there in the hope of catching something spooky on camera.

The inspiration for this was, of course, Stephen Volk's 1992 mockumentary *Ghostwatch*, of which we were both great fans. I pointed out that any shows concentrating on a ghost vigil would make tedious viewing, as the highlight of such events tends to be occasional creaking floorboards and regular tea-breaks. We debated the possibility of including mediums and séances to liven things up, but decided that on-site dramatisations (firmly labelled as such) of stories relating to the haunting or of earlier sightings would represent a more honest approach. As I recollect, my role in all this would be that of researcher.

Needless to say, like most alcohol-fuelled ideas, this was pie-in-the-sky unless someone was

ready to fund and produce it, but following the de-regulation of British TV and a growing demand for new shows, that wasn't such a daft notion. Simon was certainly sufficiently serious about his proposal to send it to one of the independent TV companies. Alas, personal events took me out of his company and I never heard exactly how it was received or what followed. In the event, in 1996-67 the Discovery Channel aired the British series *Ghosthunters*, based on ideas undeniably similar to those we had discussed. Perhaps it was just a concept whose time had come, but I still regret that our version wasn't the one that got made – just think what forteen mischief I could have concocted!

Gail-Nina Anderson
Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Staged crashes?

While I enjoyed Roger Musson's speculative forum piece, “Accidents on the Cosmic Highway” [FT341:55], I can't help but feel that the three possibilities that he concludes as conceivable reasons for UFO crashes – enemy action, technical malfunction, and/or pilot error – is a bit limited in scope. If UFO crashes do occur, in the way that UFO pundits claim that they do, then a fourth option needs to be considered: the crashes are staged.

As John Keel, Nick Redfern, and a few others have pointed out, CE3 encounters (specifically those of Bloecher subtype C), seem weirdly hyperbolised: “There's the nature of the entities themselves: they practically overemphasize who, or what, they claim to be. Take, for example, all those ‘soil-sampling’ aliens of the 1950s and 1960s. You know the ones: someone is working in their field, or driving down a stretch of road, when they encounter a couple of diminutive aliens collecting specimens of local plants, flowers, and vegetables. ET on a scientific mission, right? No, not in my view.”

(<http://mysteriousuniverse.org/2016/04/ufos-extra->

terrestrial-probably-not/)

UFO crashes, by extension, would also seem to fit this paradigm: that is to say, they also are not what they seem. In fact, apologists for the alien/UFO connection jump through all sorts of hypothetical hoops to explain how an alien spacecraft could traverse the millions of light years necessary to reach our particular spot in the Orion-Cygnus Arm of the Milky Way when there's no need. UFOs, one might reason, have always been here. The pioneering UFO/USO researcher Ivan T Sanderson certainly thought that this might be the case and concluded that UFO/USOs are, in fact, here and have been for quite some time; either having originated on this planet or having arrived from somewhere else and setting up occupancy in our oceans, long ago. If Sanderson is right, then UFO crashes are even more anomalous than they might otherwise seem.

It's a fact, no matter how you slice it, that the 1950s and 1960s saw a rapid technological revolution – a revolution that some UFO conspiracists have associated with the recovery of downed alien craft that occurred a decade earlier. Could these ‘crashes’ have been planned as part of the evolutionary advancement of our species by a concerned ‘parent’ that felt we weren't quite living up to our potential? A kind of evolutionary ‘kick in the pants’ that sought to preserve the ‘Prime Directive’ via a messy, but otherwise acceptable, method by our frustrated forebears to get us going? Or, perhaps, such crashes are part of the “paranormal performance art” that Canadian Redstar Books publisher Paul Kimball believes some non-human intelligence has created to inspire us to think about our sum total as existential beings. Further to that line of speculation, there's also the Jungian idea that the UFO represents a psychic disturbance of sorts. To Jung, the mandala-shaped UFO is a symbolic projection of our unconscious desire for God in an increasingly atheistic society; a tulpian manifestation of a deep-seated religious longing for something larger than ourselves. So to see it crash and burn...?

Whatever the case, the fact that

UFOs seem to crash, as rumour suggests, leaves us with many more questions about the phenomenon than answers. But perhaps that's the whole point. It's not so much about the driving skills of the pilot(s) involved but rather what our species learns about itself when writing up the ticket. I have had a number of experiences, including a missing time incident, that fit the stereotypical ‘alien encounter’ reports, but in some ways do not.

Trevor Ouellette
Ontario, Canada

Re saucer crashes: even for advanced civilisations surely these craft are costly to produce, assuming such crashes are real in the first place. We wonder if the crashes are small in number compared with those who observe us or pass by, presumably cloaked in invisibility shields, and if the relatively rare crashes are due to malfunctions which also cause the craft to be then visible. Even ‘superior technology’ might go pearshaped.

E Beckett and K Bell
London

Regarding Roger Musson's musings on the improbability of alien craft crashing, he will probably be glad to hear that somebody at Disney/Pixar already had the same idea. I refer to their short film *Lifted* (readily available on YouTube), which never fails to reduce me to helpless laughter. Well worth a watch for all fortetans with a sense of humour.

Dr Nicola Senior
University of Exeter

More things in Heaven and Earth...

The Forum article by Roger Musson [FT341:55] regarding rookie ET pilots who are always crashing demonstrated a lack of knowledge on this subject. Please allow a long-time ufologist to comment. I was born in 1950 and have had a lifelong intuitive belief and fascination in the subject, subscribing to *Flying Saucer Review* in 1965. I have travelled around Great Britain, and as far afield as Puerto Rico and Nevada to research re-



“Suction!”

ported experiences, learning some astounding things.

Firstly, Mr Musson writes: "Nowadays we know that none of the other planets in our Solar System are capable of supporting life". Most astrophysicists agree that Mars once was a thriving world with all the attributes of Earth. For some reason(s), it lost most of its atmosphere. What happened to its assumed inhabitants? If they were technologically advanced enough they would have had time perhaps to tunnel inside their planet, or build covered areas with artificial atmospheres inside. Some Martians may still be there. Many believe that intelligent life is common throughout the Universe and naturally evolves or is designed, seeded and nurtured by biogenetic engineering programmes wherever possible.

NASA has lied about the true Moon situation, choosing to perpetuate the Dead Moon Myth. Jose Escamilla's films *Celestial* and *Moonrising* (YouTube; pictured above) show the true colours of the Moon. Vast areas of blues and greens are seen in footage taken by the USA Clementine orbiter of 1994 plus film from amateur astronomers with state-of-the-art telescopes. Astronauts' statements during the Apollo missions hint at a Moon different from the official line. From *Moongate* (1982) by William L Brian II, we learn: "On the Apollo 11 mission, less than 13,000 miles before reaching the Moon, Armstrong stated, 'I can see sky all around the Moon, even on the rim of it, where there's no earthshine or moonshine.'" (*Indianapolis News*, 19 July 1969)

From Don Wilson's book, *Our Mysterious Spaceship Moon* (1975) – Apollo 16, Duke speaking from *LM Orion* resting on the Moon: "If this place had air, it'd sure be beautiful. It's beautiful with or without air, the scenery up on top of Stone Mountain, you'd have to be there to see this to believe it. Those domes are incredible!" From *Alien Bases on the Moon* (1981) by Fred Steckling: The February 1972 issue of *National Geographic* magazine reported Apollo 15 findings that the Moon has a magnetic field and it *does* have a thin atmosphere. It also stated that the Apollo 11 crew found the Moon not barren or



desolate but "dynamic and beautiful", the complete opposite of NASA's mantra. In *Footprints on the Moon* by Associated Press, colour photos taken on the Apollo 8 mission reveal a brown, almost desert-like landscape with vegetation (certainly green-coloured) growing in shady areas of hills and craters. Does this sound like the grey, atmosphereless, featureless lump of rubble that NASA portrays?

From my Wake Up! Files: USAF Space scientist Jerome Pearson at Wright Patterson Research Centre told the International Space Conference in Brighton in October 1987: "The Earth and Moon are a double planet system". If NASA lies about the Moon and Mars, there must surely be many structures and artefacts still visible, then why should we believe their version of Venus (a poisonous atmosphere with no possibility of any sort of life)? So, if we just look in our immediate Solar System neighbourhood we can see that Mr Musson's assertion was misleading. "UFOs, if craft they be, must be capable of interstellar travel using technology that we can barely imagine the workings of." There is a famous quote by Ben Rich of Lockheed Martin Skunkworks dept. He said prior to his death in 1995: "Reverse engineering energy and propulsion systems [from ET] had been mastered between 1954-57 [...] We already have the means to travel among the stars, but these technologies are locked up in black projects and it would take an Act of God to ever get them out to benefit humanity [...] Anything you can think of we already know how to do".

So some UFOs are actually of terrestrial origin. I don't doubt the Secret Space Programme for a moment. Does any freethinking person imagine that world powers still have to rely on fuel rockets and tin cans (e.g. the International Space Station) for their journeys into the cosmos? Technology has advanced incredibly in all other fields, apart from Space missions; it doesn't add up. If anything they've regressed since the days of the Moon landings 45 years ago. Who are they kidding? There are of course a lot more claims by many insiders regarding advanced, secret Space drive propulsion systems.

Two other queries can be covered together: "Why do the ruddy things crash at all?" and "I doubt if any terrestrial military is going to fire on a non-aggressive UFO". The conclusion reached by many serious researchers on crash retrievals (see the work of the late Leonard Stringfield for excellent coverage) is that radar introduced towards the end of WWII and since brought them down. This was accidental, but the pulsed microwaves didn't actually destroy the alien craft but interfered with their force fields, disabling them. Once world powers realised this, particularly the Americans, more powerful electromagnetic beams were weaponised deliberately to target UFOs and bring them down in chosen mostly uninhabited regions. One assumes ETs overcame the original radar problem reasonably quickly, but the directed EMP weapons and even more advanced SDI (Star Wars) arsenal are able to locate and destroy the unaware.

A perfect example is the Space

Shuttle footage of STS-48, showing a bright controlled object approaching Earth's atmosphere when a massive flash (warning signal) is seen. The apparent UFO does an instant V turn to avoid a missile or beam weapon aimed at it from the Earth. The Earth-based weapon carries on its path directly through the UFO's original trajectory. STS-80: an Earth-based missile with an exotic propulsion system, estimated speed 500 miles a second, was reverse-tracked by computer engineer and specialist in digital imagery analysis Dr Mark Carlotto to the Caribbean island of Vieques, which belongs to neighbouring Puerto Rico. Both islands are part of the American Commonwealth and were used extensively as military bases up until 2004.

Thanks to local ufologist and journalist Jorge Martin, we know of the startling amount of supposed ET phenomena in that part of the world. The estimated speed of the above missile would put it in the 'EM containment plasma fusion rocket engine' league. David Adair, take a bow. Taking heed of erstwhile Canadian Secretary of Defence Paul Hellyer's information that "UFOs are as common as planes above our heads", the UFO situation is now as controlled as possible.

The USA has certainly worked out the physics even to the extent of interdimensional crossovers. You would think (hope) that our visitors from whatever realms would have far superior technology to cancel out the Americans' lethal tactics. Unfortunately, the capabilities of the Secret Space Programme must be immense, both in operational technologies and the ability to keep the lid of Pandora's Box tightly shut.

Mike Prentis
Nottingham

Not a Mason

To avoid any ambiguity I should perhaps mention that the standfirst for my article "Three Centuries of English Freemasonry" (FT 344: 14-15), beginning "David V Barrett is definitely on the level...", should not be taken to imply that I am a Freemason.

David V Barrett
London

Trickery denied

In a recent and interesting letter [FT342:73], Andrew Summers mentioned the alleged haunting of a manor house at Hinton Ampner, Hampshire, in the 18th century, and quoted from chapter VIII of Allan Fea's long out-of-print *Secret Chambers and Hiding Places*.¹ Fea suggested that, for years, servants had fabricated ghostly phenomena without detection, and that when the property was demolished, numerous secret stairs and passages, not known to exist, were brought to light, "which had offered peculiar facilities for the deception". A footnote stated that a full account of the supernatural occurrences at Hinton Ampner could be found in a biography of Richard Barham.²

However, the relevant part of the Barham biography (v.1, pp.305-315) makes no mention of secret places being found when the house was demolished, nor of shenanigans by servants; and it seemingly falls far short of providing a full, clear and accurate account of what happened. It doesn't explicitly identify the location as Hinton Ampner, and it states, incorrectly, that Mrs Mary Ricketts (see below) went there almost immediately after her husband had departed for Jamaica on business. According to an account written by Mrs Ricketts herself, which is reproduced in books by Harry Price and Sacheverell Sitwell,^{3,4} her family and servants had been in residence there since January 1765, well before her husband left for Jamaica in late 1769. And she reported that ghostly phenomena had been occurring since early in their occupancy, well before her husband's departure.

Fea cites no specific sources for his contentions about the detection of secret spaces in the house and the fabrication of phenomena by servants; but I suspect that he was drawing on the questionable assertions of John Duthy, the author of *Sketches of Hampshire*, originally published in 1839.⁵ Duthy claimed that the present-day mansion in Hinton Ampner was built on the site of the old (supposedly haunted) one. However, although close, the new mansion *isn't* on the exact site of the old house [see FT312:68, 336:74].

Apparently relying on nothing



more than conjecture or rumour, Duthy asserted that "the domestics of [the] family were the contrivers of the artifices"; and, without citing any source, he claimed that "it was [...] discovered [during the demolition of the house] that in the thickness of the walls were private passages and stairs, not generally known to exist, [which] offered peculiar facilities for carrying on, without detection, the mysteries of a haunted house." He also mentioned a "story whispered among the old inhabitants of the neighbourhood", according to which, "one wintry night", the brother of Mrs Ricketts caught a female domestic fabricating phenomena, which she'd allegedly done before, whereupon she was dismissed – although, for some reason, the detection of her mischief wasn't generally made public.

Duthy's book doesn't name Mrs Ricketts as such, but states that having come to believe that the phenomena were supernatural, she couldn't be easily convinced they were caused by mischievous domestics; but judging from Price's book, her brother, Captain (later Admiral) Jervis, first got to hear about the disturbances during a visit to the house in the summer of 1771, and soon after experienced anomalous auditory phenomena there himself. He apparently left the house before 9 August that year, with "his sister and her children [departing] very soon after" (p.130). If so, it seems unlikely that Jervis could have detected a prankster on a "wintry night", unless, of course, we're to assume that the family returned to the house with servants at a later point.⁶

Mrs Ricketts seems to have been an astute and intelligent woman. Assuming that she wasn't lying or mentally ill, she appears to have provided important first- and second-hand testimony; but Fea doesn't seem to have been fully conversant with it, or maybe he chose not to reflect it accurately. He stated that "a female figure was *often* seen to rush through the apartments" [my emphasis]. However, Mrs Ricketts herself recorded only one such sighting of a mysterious female figure during her occupancy (apparently not witnessed by her personally). Furthermore, various aspects of her account don't accord well with the contention that mischievous servants had concocted the phenomena. For example, there was apparently a turnover of servants, with Mrs Ricketts noting that, at the time of her leaving, she didn't have any servant who'd been with her from the outset of her occupancy.

The supposed existence of secret passages and stairs in the old house was, I suspect, simply sceptical conjecture, aimed at explaining away the reported manifestations. Somewhere along the line, their rumoured existence and the supposed trickery by servants may have been wrongly accepted as established facts. However, even if the house did contain secret stairs and passages, it doesn't necessarily follow that some of the servants knew about them, and used them to simulate ghostly effects. Equally, an occasional prank by a member of the domestic staff wouldn't entitle us to infer that *all* of the phenomena had been fabricated.

According to the account of Mary Ricketts, "after Midsummer [1771] the [ghostly] noises became every night more intolerable." They began before she went to bed, and – with intermissions – "were heard till after broad day in the morning." Therefore, if the phenomena at that time were being generated by one or more pranksters, the individual(s) concerned must have been devoting a truly prodigious amount of time to the mischief.

The late Ralph Dutton, the 8th Lord Sherborne, who bequeathed his Hinton Ampner estate (including the present-day Hinton Ampner House) to the National Trust, seemed to accept that the old house was indeed haunted. In his book *Hinton Ampner: A Hampshire Manor*,⁷ he refers to the demolition of the old house (pp.51-52), but makes no reference to the discovery of secret stairs and passages.

NOTES

¹ SH Bousfield, London, 1901. This book is freely available online at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13918/13918-h/13918-h.htm>

² Fea doesn't name or reference this two-volume work fully. It is: *The Life and Letters of the Rev. Richard Harris Barham, Author of The Ingoldsby Legends: With a Selection from his Miscellaneous Poems*. The author was his son, RHD Barham, and it was published in 1870 by Richard Bentley of London.

³ Harry Price, *Poltergeist: Tales of the Supernatural*, pp.129-144. Bracken Books, London, 1993. (First published as *Poltergeist over England* by Country Life in 1945.)

⁴ Sacheverell Sitwell, *Poltergeists: An Introduction and Examination followed by Chosen Instances*, pp.230-267, 1940; reprinted by Dorset Press, New York, 1988. [Although the titles of the Price and Sitwell books contain the word 'Poltergeist' or 'Poltergeists', some of the cases they discuss, including the one at Hinton Ampner, would be better described as *hauntings*.]

⁵ It was republished by Laurence Oxley of Alresford, Hants, in 1972. The relevant pages are 22-24.

⁶ According to Sitwell, op cit, p.264, Mrs Ricketts seems to have subsequently returned to the house once, and heard a sound that caused her indescribable terror.

⁷ Published by the National Trust, Swindon, 2010.

Peter A McCue
By email

it happened to me...

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A fog in Wigan

One night in 1991, I was driving around the Wigan area [in Greater Manchester] testing walkie-talkies for range. My wife was at home with one of the radios and I had the other. Reception was good. As I drove down a country lane in Red Rock, near Wigan, I noticed a bank of fog. Reception on the radio was still OK and I continued to speak to my wife.

As I drove into the fog, I was bombarded by a high-pitched whistle, which got louder and louder and became so painful that I became disorientated. I made sure that the car radio was off and I also thought I had switched off the walkie-talkie. However, the noise got worse. I found that my left ear was bleeding and I also had the distinct impression that there was 'someone' in the passenger seat. I couldn't understand what was happening. Suddenly, I found myself driving out of the fog, with my left ear hurting and the left side of my face burning. I then heard my wife shouting over the walkie-talkie.

"Bill, come in! Where are you? Why are you not answering?"

"Not answering? I've never stopped talking to you."

"I've been shouting my head off for the last half-hour and you've not replied. I was worried sick. What's going on?"

Driving home was difficult as I felt unwell and the car, usually so reliable, was acting up. My wife was shocked at my dishevelled and bloodied appearance. My ear was bleeding and the left side of my face was sunburned. I spewed up masses of a clear liquid, like water but thicker. I felt very tired and went to bed. After troubled dreams I awoke with a jolt, not knowing where I was; real terror swept over me

and I was overwhelmed by claustrophobia. I almost ripped the door off its hinges getting out of the bedroom. To this day, my fear of being trapped in confined spaces is beyond belief.

My wife reckoned that I was "missing" for exactly 30 minutes, although I was unaware of a time-loss and had no clue what had happened to me. I felt so ill that I visited my GP, who sent me for tests at our local hospital. My blood count was dangerously low; as for the "sunburn", the consultants just asked me if I had fallen asleep under a sun lamp. One of them asked me if I worked near strong magnetic fields, such as a power station. I told him that the nearest I had been to a power station was a 13amp-wall socket.

Since the experience, my health got very bad. I started to have weird and sometimes scary dreams, such as images of skinned animals on hooks. Creatures with big black eyes told me that the images were a warning for mankind. One pointed at the pitiful (and still living!) animals on hooks on a sort of conveyor belt over a street with children playing and mothers smiling and happily gardening, oblivious to the plight of the animals that were going for processing. The belt led down into a beautiful valley to a factory, belching steam.

The creature said: "Man, this is you, this is what you are. Until you learn to treat other

"As I drove into the fog I was bombarded by a loud high-pitched whistle"

creatures as you would treat yourselves, there is no hope for you." After that dream, I turned vegetarian for a couple of years. I went to see a psychologist, who suggested hypnosis. After coming out of hypnosis the therapist said that he had taped the conversation and wanted nothing further to do with the matter. He left the room and suggested I listen to the recording. I couldn't believe my ears! My voice was saying that I had been abducted by aliens.

It seems that as I hit the fog bank, my car and I were lifted into a UFO. I was stripped, placed on a 'table', and attended to by several small grey creatures and one that looked human. They did various tests on me. The 'room' was quite big and there were a lot of 'greys' messing about with other people. Next to me on a similar table was a naked young girl. She was terrified and kept asking me if she was dreaming. I told that I didn't think so. She calmed down a little and told me that she came from the Parbold area of Wigan, and wanted to know where she was. I got agitated as a man was being led past me by the 'greys' toward a metallic spiral staircase that led to a semi-circular door, quite high up to my right. Images of Nazi atrocities flashed through my mind and I had the impression that they were going to do something horrible to him. I thrashed about and shouted, and the 'human' approached me. He was in his fifties, quite normal in appearance, and seemed to be in charge. He didn't speak to the 'greys', although he appeared to control them. The ensuing conversation seemed to take place in my head. "Don't worry," he said, "everything's OK, the man you see is going back to where we picked him up. All that we're doing is preparing him. Unfortunately, the device we use to get you out of your bed or wherever and into our ship is quite stressful to humans. You are not very strong and it can be dangerous, so we have to prepare your bodies for the trip. Don't worry, as you will be going next."

"How do you pick us up?"

"The best way I can explain it is that we shift you in time... Well, more like inter-dimensionally. We can't put you back at exactly the same time as we picked you up but we can pick you up from anywhere we want to."

"What do you call the machine?"

"It's called a dimensional shift device."

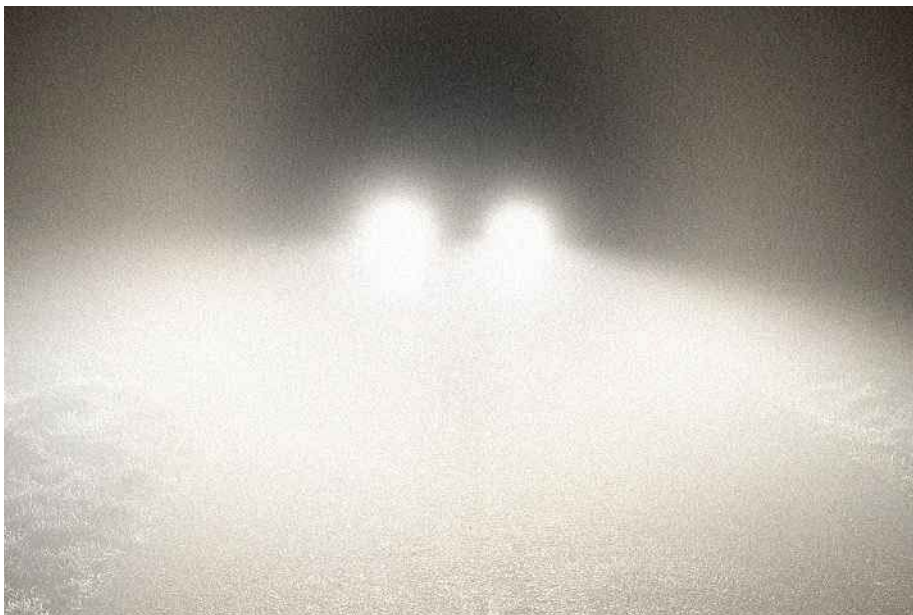
I heard all this but his lips never moved.

When I say I heard him it was more like pictures in my head, but it seemed to be in my ears. I believed him and calmed down.

Since that day, other odd things have happened and I am convinced that I have been abducted several times. I have awoken with bruises, long spindly finger marks on my arms and torso, my pyjamas on inside out, and so forth.

Bill Eatock

By email



POLICE THE ILLUSTRATED LAW COURTS AND WEEK

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

50. MACHNOW THE GIANT

Feodor Machnow was born in 1878 in the village of Kasciuki, near Vitebsk, in what is today Belarus. After his mother had died in childbirth, he was raised by his grandparents.

His father later remarried and took Feodor back; in his second marriage, the father sired three children of normal size. Not much is known about Machnow's early years, except that already as a schoolboy, he grew to be very tall. In 1902, when he was 24 years old, he married the local schoolmistress Efrosinja Lebedeva, and soon was the father of a healthy young daughter. A local impresario made plans to have the 7ft 10in (239cm) tall giant exhibited for money: in 1902, Machnow went to Moscow, and in 1903 and 1904 he was exhibited in Berlin and Paris to great acclaim. His management exaggerated his height, claiming that he was 9ft 8in (294cm) tall, and they made him dress in a Cossack outfit, with high boots, an embroidered greatcoat, and a tall fur hat.

In early February 1905, Feodor and his manager Oscar Bollinger travelled from Berlin to London in a specially chartered saloon. The journey was not a particularly pleasant one, since due to his height and bulk, the giant had to travel in a reclining position, on both land and sea. His wife and child travelled with him. He was contracted to be exhibited at the Hippodrome, and the management of this establishment had hired a very large carriage to pick the giant up at Victoria Station. There was much consternation when Machnow stepped out into the Strand, to be measured for a dress suit at a tailor's shop: it required 15 yards of double width cloth, five times more than for an ordinary man. When Feodor wanted some refreshments after being measured, he was



ABOVE: A feature on Feodor Machnow, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 18 February 1905.

STRATED WEEKLY RECORD NEWS



ABOVE LEFT: The London Hippodrome in an old postcard. ABOVE RIGHT: A French postcard records Machnow's Paris appearance. BELOW: Machnow in Germany.

given a jug containing five pints of milk, in which were beaten 33 eggs; the thirsty giant drank the cholesterol-rich contents of the jug with audible satisfaction. Machnow was a great success at the Hippodrome, where he was greeted by full houses. The Prince and Princess of Wales came to see him on 6 March. When Feodor was taken to Brighton in a motor car, he was insured for £5,000. He went in a 24 hp Napier, and his wife followed in a 10 hp de Dion. The giant enjoyed his ride, and he drank quantities of hot milk and port wine, although he worried about his wife and child, and refused to take any food in their absence.

Machnow was somewhat feeble-minded, and his linguistic ability was limited to the Russian dialect spoken in his native village and a few words of German. His wife supervised the giant's interactions with the outside world, but he could only communicate through a Russian interpreter. He lived at the Hippodrome, something that was cheap and convenient for the management, who did not want any person to see the giant for free. Picture postcards of the 'Hippodrome Giant' enjoyed excellent sales. One of them had the giant's menu on the reverse: he breakfasted at 9am, drinking two pints of milk and a pint of tea, and eating 16 hard-boiled eggs and six to eight small loaves of bread and butter.



Luncheon was served at 12 noon: he ate two to three pounds of meat and five pounds of potatoes, and drank two pints of beer. Dinner was served at 5pm: a large bowl of soup, three to five pounds of meat, fowl, fish and vegetables, three pounds of bread, and three pints of beer. Supper was at 9pm: two pints of tea, between 10 and 15 eggs, and bread and butter. Before and after each performance on stage, he drank three pints of strong broth. This unwholesome and calorie-rich diet ensured that Machnow was as sturdy as he was tall: he steadily increased in weight, and soon reached 365lb (166kg).

Machnow remained at the London Hippodrome at least until April 1905. He was exhibited in Paris in June the same year, and then went on to Belgium, Holland and Italy. There is a story that while in Rome, he was received in audience by the Pope, who gave the giant's pretty little daughter a gold cross on a chain. In March 1906, the giant was exhibited in Cardiff, and the following month, he was back in London. Machnow had been seen by an agent of William Hammerstein's music-hall in New York, where a plethora of human and animal performers were being exhibited. The giant's management was approached with an offer, and it was agreed that he should cross the Atlantic in June 1906, when his tour of



ABOVE: A postcard showing Machnow and his car in front of the Hippodrome, with the giant's daily menu on the reverse.

The following is his food for one day :—

BREAKFAST, 9 a.m.—One to two quarts of milk or tea, sixteen hard-boiled eggs, six to eight small loaves and butter.

LUNCHEON, 12 mid-day.—Two to three pounds of meat, five pounds of potatoes, one quart of beer.

DINNER, 5 p.m.—Soup, three to five pounds of meat, fowl, fish, vegetables, potatoes, three pounds of bread, one to two quarts of beer.

SUPPER, 9 p.m.—Ten to fifteen eggs, with bread and butter and one quart of tea.

Before and after each Performance three pints of OXO.

France and Britain had been completed. It was arranged that on 4 June the giant would embark on the liner *Pretoria* for New York. Machnow was transported to the Prince of Wales dock in Dover, but when it was explained to him that he was about to cross the Atlantic, he refused to leave the carriage, since he was very fearful of the sea. In spite of the tearful entreaties of his wife, he would not budge. His management team then called for the service of 20 sailors, and the giant was forcibly pulled out of the carriage and carried on board the liner.

He had an unhappy time on board ship, since everything was too small for him and he suffered badly from sea-sickness. He slept on a number of mattresses on the floor of the stewards' cabin. Since the other passengers protested against dining in the same room as the giant, he ate alone. When the ship arrived at Ellis Island, Machnow was detained by the immigration authorities, since some mean-spirited person in Newcastle had written an anonymous letter stating that the giant was weak-minded, and that he had been compelled to cross the seas against his will. But Hammerstein had a tame doctor in readiness to vouch for Machnow's sanity, and the giant and his wife and children were set at large in New York.

In July 1906, William Hammerstein arranged a publicity stunt for his music-hall: the giant would be taken for a ride in an automobile to Central Park, where he would take a walk and meet some of his admirers.

HE STUCK TO A SIMPLE AND RUSTIC DIET OF MEAT, POTATOES, LARD AND CABBAGES

A band was playing in Central Park, but the music stopped when Machnow stepped out of the automobile. A crowd of people soon formed around him, and he greeted some small children, who were quite frightened by this towering colossus. When he wanted to shake the hand of a timid old lady, she dropped in fright on a bench. A number of policemen made an appearance, accusing Mr Hammerstein and Machnow of causing a crowd, and calling for the people to disperse. Hammerstein was forced to sign a bail bond by an officious police sergeant, but when the giant was asked to sign it, he refused to do so. The timid Machnow had been frightened by the policemen shouting and blowing their whistles, and he had got it into his head that if he were to sign the bail bond, he would be signing away his children, and he would rather die in a dungeon than do that. The police sergeant then arrested the giant and took him to the police station in their patrol wagon. Machnow's wife, who was also

arrested, wept and cried, but the giant would still not sign. In the end, the wife, who was the only person who could communicate with the muddled giant, said that if he would not sign the document, he would surely die in the cells, and then the American doctors would steal his bones. This prospect frightened the giant so much that he agreed to sign it, and he was free to go, returning to the music-hall in the automobile, greatly relieved that his children had not been taken away from him.

William Hammerstein also arranged for Machnow, who had previously met the German chancellor, the Prince of Wales, and the Pope, to be taken to Washington to be introduced to President Theodore Roosevelt. Feodor found it hard to believe that the President really lived in the White House, since there were no soldiers there. An interpreter was present, and the giant addressed Mr Roosevelt as "King and Emperor of all the Peoples of the World". He wanted to kiss the President's hand, but this was not allowed. As Machnow was transported back to the railway station, his wife threw a tantrum, since she did not believe that the man with the eye-glasses they had just met was really the President, since he was not surrounded by soldiers and his portrait was not on the money she had seen. They had been fooled, she exclaimed, and demanded they be taken back to New York straight away.

The giant remained in New York for several months, being exhibited at



ABOVE: Two postcards of Machnow at the London Hippodrome, resplendent in 'Cossack' dress, with an embroidered greatcoat and tall fur hat.

Hammerstein's music-hall, before making a tour of the provinces. There were many newspaper articles about him, and some of the reporters were allowed to interview him through an interpreter. They found him childlike and wholly reliant on his wife when dealing with the them. He had little strength and little courage, and the only areas in which he showed talent were in eating and smoking cigarettes. In spite of being surrounded by various American delicacies, he stuck to a simple and rustic diet of meat, potatoes, lard and cabbages, with plentiful helpings of eggs with every meal. He used to smoke 80 strong Russian cigarettes each day. He was meek and vacillating, and as long he had a good supply of food and cigarettes, his wife could boss him about at will. Machnow's greatest fear was that the American doctors would murder him, so they could get hold of his skeleton and exhibit it. While he was in New York, a certain Dr Carleton Simon had offered \$1,000 for Machnow's brain, since he wanted to examine the pituitary for abnormalities, and the fearful giant imagined that the medical man would kidnap him to saw his cranium open and take out the brain.

Fearing the American doctors, Machnow left the United States, and returned to his home in Russia. He had been allowed to keep a proportion of the earnings from his long tour, enough for him to buy a large amount of land near his native village: he was now a peasant no longer, but an independent

landowner.

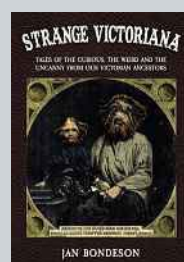
The stalwart Otto Bollinger persuaded him to return to Britain in June 1908 for another stint at the London Hippodrome, followed by a long tour of the provinces, including Burnley, Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham. The giant's wife and two children, a boy and a girl, were with him throughout this tour. His unwholesome diet made sure that he was slowly but steadily increasing in weight; his even more pernicious smoking habits led to attacks of bronchitis with incessant coughing.

The ailing Macnow returned once more to his home country with his wife and children. He suffered from circulatory problems in his huge feet, and from chronic bronchitis that eventually led to his death, from pneumonia, in 1912. His wife made sure that a fine gravestone was erected to celebrate the giant and his unique career; it is still standing today.

A key question is, of course, how tall Machnow really was. In 1903, he was stated to be 10ft 6in (320cm) tall, in London in 1905, 9ft 8in (294cm), and in America in 1906, 9ft 2in (279cm). A website celebrating the giant claimed that he was 9ft 6in (290cm) in height and thus the tallest person to have walked the earth. The objection is, however, that giants on show have always exaggerated their height. Daniel Cajanus, the 'Swedish Giant' (1704-1749) used to claim that he was 8ft 4in (254cm) tall, whereas in reality he was 7ft 8in (234cm), and the 'Irish Giant' Charles

Byrne (1761-1783) also claimed that he was 8ft 4in (254cm) height, although he was 'only' 7ft 10in (239cm). In the photographs of Feodor Machnow, care was always taken to make sure that the giant was wearing a tall hat or an enormous fur cap, and that he was surrounded by very short people. According to the American newspapers, Machnow's wife was 5ft 4in (163cm) height, and analysis of four photographs where she is depicted next to her gigantic husband would indicate that Machnow was around 7ft 8in (234cm) tall, and definitely no taller than 7ft 10in (239cm), the height given for him in his Wikipedia entry. Thus, although Machnow was definitely a true acromegalic giant, he was far from one of the extreme examples, and there is no question of him challenging Wadlow's height.

Jan Bondeson's collection of stories from the *Illustrated Police News*, *Strange Victoriana*, is now available from Amberley Publishing, priced £20. (www.amberley-books.com)



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Why Fortean?



Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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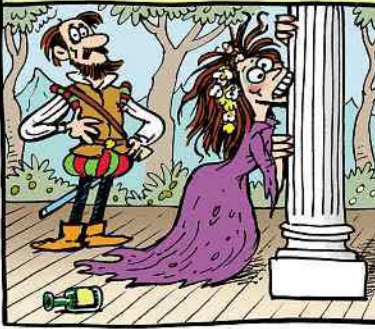
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VICTORIA'S HUSBAND TURNED OUT TO BE A MORPHINE ADDICT AND A WASTER...



TO SUPPORT HER HUSBAND'S HABIT, AND HER YOUNG FAMILY, VICTORIA BECAME AN ACTRESS...



...AND SOMETIMES... UM... AN "ACTRESS"...



BUT ONE NIGHT, WHILE ON STAGE, SHE HAD A VISION OF HER YOUNGER SISTER, TENNESSEE!



SHE RAN OFF STAGE AND NEVER RETURNED!!



THE SISTERS WORKED TOGETHER AGAIN IN A TRAVELLING SHOW! VICTORIA READ "AURAS" AND HEALED THE SICK...



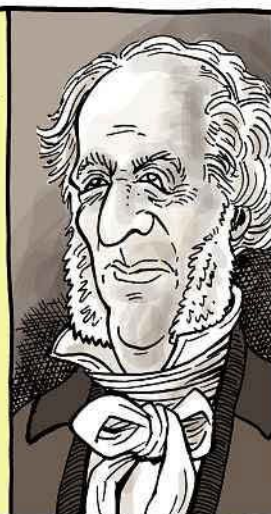
...AND HER "MAGNETIC ENERGY" WAS SO POWERFUL THAT WHEN, ONCE, SHE SCOWLED AT A GRUMPY OLD WOMAN...



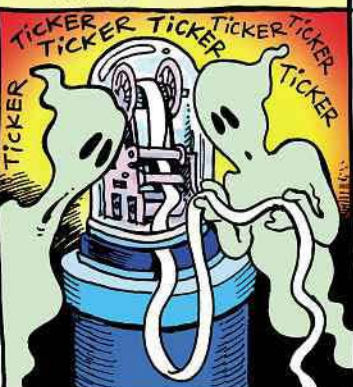
HER POWERS REALLY DID SEEM MIRACULOUS! WHEN HER INFANT SON, BYRON, DIED, SHE USED HER "ENERGIES" TO BRING HIM BACK TO LIFE!



IN 1868, THE SISTERS MOVED TO NEW YORK, WHERE THEY WERE SOON SOUGHT OUT BY THE ECCENTRIC MILLIONAIRE CORNELIUS VANDERBILT...



OL' VAN ASKED THEM TO CONSULT THE SPIRITS ABOUT HIS RAILROAD SHARES...



BINGO!! THE SPIRITS GOT IT RIGHT, AND CORNELIUS TROUSERED \$90K PROFIT!

SO HE ASKED VICTORIA TO ASK THE OTHER SIDE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF GOLD PRICES...



DOUBLE BINGO!! JUST AS THE SPIRITS HAD PREDICTED, THE PRICE OF GOLD SOARED, THEN (AS CORNELIUS DUMPED ALL HIS SHARES) PLUMMETED! BANKS WERE WIPED OUT AND FINANCIERS COMMITTED SUICIDE IN DROVES!



VANDERBILT HAD MADE \$1.3m. OVERNIGHT! BUT HE KEPT HIS WORD, AND GAVE THE SISTERS HALF OF IT - VICTORIA WAS SUDDENLY RICH!



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ON SALE 13 OCT 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



A mummified man was found hugging a pine tree in the northern outskirts of Tomsk, Siberia, sitting on a branch some 50ft (15m) above the ground. It is thought he climbed the tree in winter and died of hypothermia, with both arms hugging the tree. The mummy was spotted on 1 July by local man Pavel Petrov, near a road leading to the 'closed city' of Seversk, from which foreigners are banned, where Russia enriches and reprocesses uranium and plutonium. "My father and I found the body," he told *The Siberian Times*. "He was sitting on a pine tree some 50 metres [164ft] away from the road." The man was dressed in a navy vest, a sweatshirt, trousers and valenki – traditional Russian felt boots. The man, yet to be identified, died in about November 2015 according to a preliminary examination. *Daily Mirror online*, 6 July 2016.

On 22 January, police found a man's body concealed in the branches of a 25ft (7.6m) fir tree just yards from a school's front gates in Romford, east London. The dead man, named locally as Peter Usher, 39, was last seen in Romford on 29 December. "He was in the tree right at the front of the school," said Mary Morrison, head teacher of the 700-pupil Bower Park Academy. "It's quite a dense tree but it's bizarre none of us saw anything. Thank God no children did." *Sun*, 23 June 2016.

Joshua M Burwell, 33, of Sheridan, Indiana, stopped his car in San Diego, California, to photograph the sunset, but was so distracted by the camera phone in his hands that he plummeted over Sunset Cliffs and was killed. *cnet.com*, 27 Dec 2015.

A seven-year-old girl died on 26 July at Rabat Zoo in Morocco when an elephant, a female called Assia, picked up a large stone and hurled it more than 10 yards over a huge ditch and a wooden barrier toward visitors. The girl, who was sitting on her father's shoulders posing for a photograph beside the elephant enclosure, was struck on the back of the head and died in hospital hours later. Phyllis Lee, Scientific Director of the Amboseli Trust for Elephants, says that targeted throwing of stones and branches by elephants is very unusual. "It can happen when elephants are frustrated or bored," she said. "In my opinion, it's unlikely the elephant was directly targeting the girl – but exhibiting frustration. You can't predict what animals in captivity will do." *BBC News*, 28 July; *CBS News*, *Metro*, *D.Mail*, 29 July 2016.

An elephant in Java charged at Octavia Warahapsari before picking her up with its trunk and trampling her to death. The 25-year-old vet had been caring for two endangered Sumatran elephants at the Gajah Mungkur reservoir and was taking photographs of them on 11 May when one of them charged at her. *Metro*, 12 May 2016.

A 68-year-old Toronto man died after a cat bit him on the right thumb – but the cause was so

rare that a case study was published in the *World Journal of Clinical Cases*. The bacterium *Pasteurella multocida*, which lives in many pets' mouths, caused a 4in (10cm)-wide aneurysm in the abdominal section of the man's aorta (the large vessel descending from the heart to the abdomen) that ultimately ruptured. A portion of the aorta was fixed using a tube graft, but 13 days later the man developed septic shock and died. When his wife mentioned – upon the his admission to the hospital – the four-week-old cat bite whose local infection had since healed, doctors dismissed it as the cause of his symptoms, which included elevated heart-rate, low blood pressure, abdominal pain, and sudden weight loss. "Sometimes as physicians we roll our eyes at information that seems to be extraneous," said study co-author Dr Dennis Cho. "Only looking back did we realise this was probably the key to unlocking the true diagnosis." *USA Today*, 2 July 2026.

On 16 May, a severed head was found at the Block Fen Drove quarry in Mepal, near Ely in Cambridgeshire. The worker who found the head after taking the cover off a skip initially thought it had come from a discarded mannequin, but then realised it had eyebrows and hair, and was an actual human head, possibly from a woman in her 30s or 40s. "He said it had blood all over and was covered in dirt, but didn't look like it had disintegrated," said a colleague. The Mepal site is used for landfill and recycling as well as the supply of aggregates such as limestone and gravel, and mixing concrete. The skip had been picked up from a construction site below a railway bridge in Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, 40 miles (64km) away. Experts from the Natural History Museum determined that the head came from a man [sic] aged between 30 and 50. The prevailing hypothesis is that he was decapitated by a passing train in an unreported accident at least a decade ago and possibly as long ago as the 1960s. (No one mentions what might have become of his torso.) It is thought the head then became lodged in the railway bridge and remained there unnoticed before coming loose when the structure was cleaned. It was then scooped up in material and taken to the Mepal site. No DNA matches were found at the National Crime Agency's missing person's database. It's a puzzle how hair and eyebrows could survive in the open air for a decade or more, presumably attached to a fragmentary scalp. *Western Mail (Cardiff)*, *D.Star*, 18 May; *D.Telegraph*, *Cambridge News*, 25 June 2016.

It was curtains for a 58-year-old delivery driver in New Jersey when a tape measure fell 50 storeys and hit him on the head. *Sun on Sunday*, 21 June 2015.

Sam Sommerville, a 36-year-old chef, on holiday at a caravan park in Unstall, East Yorkshire, died on 15 August 2015 after falling on his wine glass. He bled to death after the glass he was holding pierced his neck. *D.Mirror*, 12 Dec 2015.

How to Become a Successful Writer!



By *Marian Ashcroft*

If you've ever fancied being a writer but don't know where to start – here's the answer. For the past twenty-seven years The Writers Bureau has been running a home-study Creative Writing course that teaches ordinary people how to write, get published and earn an extra income.

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Rachel Dove "I won the 2015 Flirty Fiction Prima Magazine and Mills and Boon competition. The prize was **£580**, a three page feature in the magazine and the chance to work with Mills and Boon on my book."

"Also I have three stories in three anthologies with other authors – we've raised almost **£2,300** for cancer charities"

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Katherine Kavanagh "I have been publishing my own niche website for circus critique. This work has led to recognition in my field, with work offers ranging from writing book reviews for scholarly journals to running master classes for young people. I have had two paid writing residencies at festivals this year and have been employed to write tweets. Payments total **£3,000**, plus expenses for travel, tickets to events and payments in kind in the form of review copy books."

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